

socialist

REVIEW

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The unacceptable face of trade unionism



If the C.A.P. fits

The EEC has been in the news lately and the British press has been typically nationalistic. Sue Cockerill looks at the EEC from a class standpoint.

The recent collapse of the EEC summit in Athens and the vote by the European parliament to freeze the rebate on Britain's budget contributions have given Thatcher another chance to pose as the champion of British interests against the faceless, wasteful bureaucrats in Brussels.

The Labour Party, now it has dropped its pledge to leave the EEC, can do little besides egg her on and claim that they would do a better job of upholding the 'national interest' within the EEC.

Crisis in the world economy has brought serious strains between the members of the European club of capitalists. Unofficial trade restrictions, curbs on the movement of workers, attacks on each other for 'unfair' subsidies to industry and refusals to cut back production are now commonplace.

Most publicity has gone to the biggest item—66 percent of EEC expenditure—the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Beef 'n' butter

Butter and beef mountains and wine lakes, the wholesale destruction of food while millions starve, is one of the most obviously obscene features of capitalism.

The explanation we are offered by the media for this absurdity is that European governments, especially the French, insist on subsidising small, inefficient, peasant farmers. British agriculture on the other hand is modern, productive, competitive.

The problem with this argument is that the CAP was designed to improve the productivity of agriculture and it has succeeded in doing so. So while it is true that small farmers are subsidised by the CAP it is the big farmers who grow rich on it.

What is the CAP? How does it work?

Prices for most agricultural products are fixed by the agriculture ministers of the EEC. If market prices fall below a certain level, the commission buys up everything at the 'intervention price' and stores it.

Import levies make certain that cheap import prices are raised to EEC levels, while the EEC pays farmers the difference between high European prices and world prices to enable food produced in the EEC to compete on the world market.

There are other subsidies and grants for modernisation and improvements. Besides the money paid over to producers, there is the cash handed over to store the mountains and lakes. Then because of the extremely complicated 'green' money system, when real changes in exchange rates are offset by fiddling around with the farm product or 'green' exchange rates, there are many opportunities for smuggling.

Far from preserving smallholdings, on the whole the lifetime of the CAP has seen an exodus from the land. In France, for example, numbers employed in agriculture have fallen from just over four million in 1960 to 1.8 million in 1980. In the EEC as a whole (excluding Greece), farm employment fell from 17 million to 7.7 million over the same 20 years.

Looked at in terms of the size of holdings, the number of those under 50 hectares is falling consistently in every EEC country. The total number of holdings fell by 2 to 3 percent per year in the late sixties and seventies.

The CAP also subsidises most of the products of the richer farmers: cereals, beef, dairy products. British farmers, with their large holdings (three times the size of French ones) producing precisely these commodities, are among the biggest beneficiaries of the policy. A recent estimate is that Britain's farmers are subsidised to the tune of about three billion pounds a year: more than British Rail and British Steel combined.

Besides the CAP subsidies, farmers get government grants for putting up silos and farm buildings and other 'improvements' and for draining new land. In the process of producing more food, the farmers use more and more chemicals. Crop rotation is no longer necessary given enough chemicals, so all the land can be used to produce the highly rewarded cereal crops. Cows are kept inside: pasture is a waste of profitable land. Hedges and trees come down to allow maximum use of machinery.

Even if the CAP did not exist, British farmers would get subsidies. They did before the CAP, and even now farmers can set capital equipment purchases off 100 percent against tax, and will pay about half as much tax on passing the farms to their heirs as those passing on urban property.

Even if you believe high technology farming is the face of the future, the fact remains that all this output is produced for profit, not needs. Much of it may never reach anybody's stomach.

Class issue

Food surpluses—surplus that is to profitable sale—are not a new feature of capitalism. Nor are they confined to the EEC. The US butter mountain was estimated earlier this year at 200,000 tonnes, compared to the EEC's 300,000 tonnes. The US government pays out nearly as much to its own farmers as the total CAP bill, while complaining bitterly that EEC food exports are unfairly subsidised.

One of the main items of expenditure—accounting for half the total CAP—is export subsidy. Looked at in this light it is clearer how the policy is just another aspect of capitalist competition.

The EEC was formed to allow the European capitalists more chance of competing with US capital, and later Japanese capital. Of course, neither individual firms, nor state capitals, are totally subordinated to the European bloc. But while competitive pressures pull them apart, the need to be big enough acts as a counter-pressure keeping the EEC in being.

The CAP isn't a charitable institution to keep small peasants in business. While the farm vote is important, and conservatives in Europe, the USA and Japan see the preservation of large numbers of peasants as politically desirable, the development of capitalism has resulted in fewer, larger farms, and a fall in the rural population. But the interests of poor peasants and agricultural workers are not opposed to those of urban workers.

While the issue of the CAP allows Thatcher to indulge in patriotic rhetoric, we should be clear that it is a class issue, not a national one.



A dried milk mountain stacked at a co-operative plant in Brittany



How much of a defeat?

The TUC vote not to support the NGA in breaking the Tory law represents a defeat for the whole of the working class. It is not a catastrophe. We do not face the imminent smashing of all union organisations. But the employers have won a big victory.

We need to be clear about the nature and scope of the defeat because on our assessment of what has happened will depend our response and our behaviour in the future.

The defeat was one for the whole of the class. It was not necessarily the end of the road for the NGA. There is a remote possibility that the NGA National Council might vote to restart the illegal picketing and try to get the whole show off the ground again, but it is likely that things will not go that way.

Eddie Shah has, at least for the time being, probably won the battle to produce his free sheets with non-union labour and at non-union rates. That will be a setback for the NGA and will give heart to other employers in the print.

But it does not mean that the NGA is going to collapse overnight. The writing may be on the wall, but the closed shop still exists, and it still has a great deal of power.

On a class-wide front, however, the defeat

is more serious and has rather more immediate consequences. The Tory employment laws have been tested in struggle and they have stuck. A strong union has been forced to back down.

That will demoralise and frighten militants in other areas who might be tempted to have a go at winning this or that dispute whatever the law might say. It will also provide a perfect alibi for every trade union official who wants to avoid any real struggle.

We can almost write the speech now:

'Of course I want to win this battle, just as much as you do. Of course I am opposed to these vicious laws that are an attack on this great movement of ours. Of course I recognise that workers have always had to break the law in order to win their rights. But ...

'But, Brothers and Sisters, we have to be realistic. Look what happened to the NGA. They were much better organised than us. They can stop Fleet Street. But

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they couldn't win against the law. It's just not on for us to try it.'

Not every group of workers will buy that line of argument, and not every employer confronted by a defiant workforce will scuttle off to court. But the balance has been shifted significantly. Someone tried to take on the courts and lost. The next group of workers will find it that much harder.

In recognising that, for the working class as a whole, this is a serious defeat, we have to be quite clear that it is not a disaster either.

Within a week of the setback for the NGA, the workforce of British shipbuilders voted to come out over pay, and NALGO members employed on work designed to ease the winding up of the Metropolitan counties voted not to co-operate with such plans.

At both ends of the labour movement—manual workers in an old industry and white collar workers with only very limited traditions—there is little evidence that the defeat of the NGA demoralised people to the point at which they were not prepared to fight over issues which they believed to be important.

The paradoxes of the situation are explained by what was and is one of the central features of the current period: the sectional divisions inside the working class movement are enormously deep.

Sectionalism

The NGA, of course, is the sectional union *par excellence*. It is probably the sole surviving craft union in the true sense of the word.

It was and is dependent not simply on its strength against the employers but also on its ability to exclude other workers who had not got NGA cards from certain aspects of the production process.

That sectional organisation was, historically, very successful although, outside of Fleet Street, the rewards were much smaller than popular rumour allows.

The strength and the loyalty to the union arising from that sort of organisation meant that, when the NGA leadership called for action, they got it.

But it also meant that there was no opposition when it called the action off. Throughout the whole dispute there was little or no 'spontaneous' unofficial action. The nearest there was to such militancy took place on the occasion of the first fine, when there does seem to have been serious discontent, particularly in Fleet Street. But even then, the officials, together with the FoC's were able to keep it under enough control to limit the action.

The price of a tradition of sectional strength was thus that the bureaucracy was able to keep a tight control on the development of the dispute. Further, it meant that hardly any of the rank and file were seriously prepared to challenge the bureaucracy's decision to fight the battle as the official NGA, and then to ask for support at the level of the TUC.

It is useful to compare the NGA dispute with the hospital workers just over a year ago. There is no doubt that hospital workers are much worse organised and much less powerful than the NGA. And it was partly

because of that very weakness that the best militants amongst the hospital workers were prepared both to act independently of the bureaucracy and to go outside their own patch.

The fact is that when it came to understanding the implications of a real fight against the government those nurses and ancillaries who were prepared to pile into cars and shoot off to picket a pit in the attempt to get some sort of solidarity action from miners showed more sense than did the massed ranks of the NGA who sat awaiting orders. Their *weakness* forced them to generalise.

The other side of the coin about sectionalism is that other groups of workers felt much less involved in the NGA's struggle with the law than was the case a decade ago when the level of overall political generalisation was that much higher.

Of course, even in 1972 it was never easy to get other workers to take solidarity action with, say, the Pentonville dockers. But the basis for such generalisation was there and had been built up in other battles like the miners' strike.

Now, of course, the common experience is of a string of defeats and setbacks which go to weaken links between groups of workers and which make generalisation that much more difficult.

The unexpected consequence of this sectionalism is that other groups of workers have not seen the defeat for the NGA as so serious, since they did not themselves feel involved in the struggle.

That is an illusion, however, and while it may be perceived by different groups of workers as unimportant, the truth is that this was a defeat.

The TUC, and in particular Len Murray, obviously played a key role in engineering the defeat. And in the aftermath there are those on the left who are arguing everything from the need to elect more left wing leaders through to setting up a 'leftist' TUC. Some of these ideas are simply wrong and others are madness. In order to see why we have to look at the role of the TUC in some detail.

First of all: what exactly happened?

On Friday 9 December the NGA appeared in the Manchester High Court and got its second taste of class justice. The judge, Mr Justice Eastham, remarked that he was 'satisfied that the union's principal objective was to use its muscle to try to destroy the business of Mr Shah by force.' He accordingly fined the union £525,000.

This was a far heavier fine than the previous week and it was clearly ruling class retaliation for the size and militancy of the Warrington picket the previous Tuesday night and the stopping of the national papers the previous weekend.

The response of the NGA national leadership was revealing: national officials said that 'the idea of an all-out national strike before Christmas without strike pay is a bit too much to swallow.'

The NGA leadership spent most of that day trying to get off the hook. For example, George Jerrom, recently Broad Left candidate for the General Secretaryship, went into court to present an affidavit claiming that the NGA was not responsible for the

violence the previous Tuesday night and arguing that it had proved impossible to control the picket.

What nobody actually said, but what was proved in practice, was that the NGA leadership wanted to get out of the hole they were in. They made sure, for example, that there were no stoppages on Fleet Street in response to this fine as there had been the last time round.

What they had to offer instead was the promise of a national print stoppage, for one day, the following Wednesday, *and an appeal to the TUC*. The stage for the TUC sellout was set by the NGA leadership themselves. They went to the TUC to ask for support, not as people leading a group of workers who were in action and organising, but as the leaders of a group of workers who were going to take token action in the future.

On the Monday the TUC's 'Employment Policy and Organisational Committee' (EPOC) voted narrowly, after a very long debate, to adopt a 'sympathetic and supportive attitude' to the NGA. Len Murray then went on TV to denounce the decision and that Wednesday the General Council backed him.

The debate on the EPOC is the most interesting point in the whole affair. What was not at stake was any motion committing the TUC or any of its constituent unions to any form of action. The fuss was all about whether or not there should be a statement of support in principle.

The 'left wing'

The 'left wing' of the EPOC argued that it was important to pass their motion *because it did not commit anyone to any action*. All they wanted to do was to follow TUC policy. When questioned, Moss Evans stated directly that he had no intention of calling a dock strike in support of the NGA. It was the right wing that used the argument that such a resolution would necessarily entail law-breaking action as an excuse to vote against the motion.

Murray's action in refusing to accept the EPOC vote was endorsed by the General Council on rather different grounds. Both Wade and Dubbins spoke at the General Council meeting and argued that support would have to be more than rhetorical, so the vote at that meeting was ostensibly taken along exactly opposite lines to the one at EPOC.

On the Monday the heroes of the left claimed to be voting to support the NGA because such a vote did *not* involve any commitment to action. On Wednesday they claimed to be voting to support the NGA because such a vote *did* involve a commitment to action.

We have to be quite frank and honest and say exactly what went on at these two meetings: what happened was bureaucratic manoeuvring and fancy footwork a million miles removed from the reality of the class struggle and it had nothing at all to do with any serious conception of 'left' and 'right' in the working class movement.

Start with the case of the NGA leadership. Although they were ready to fight, once the going got hot they very quickly started

forced into calling for a one day general strike.

It is not that the leaders of the TUC are today any more or less slippery and conniving than they were a decade ago. Their machinations mattered less then because they had less room for manoeuvre.

In the light of that record we can assess the talk of a 'left-wing TUC' and the like. They are, quite simply, a nonsense — and a bureaucratic, purblind nonsense at that.

There is absolutely no evidence that the people who voted 'left' at the TUC represented groups of workers who are ready and willing to fight and that those who voted 'right' represented groups that are on the retreat. There is, for example, no evidence whatsoever that one quarter of NALGO are 'left' and three quarters 'right' but their delegates voted one to three along those lines.

The vote quite simply represented a bureaucratic line-up and not one reflecting real forces in the class. On those grounds alone it is clear that talk about a split into an 'official' TUC and a 'provisional' TUC with the latter ready to fight the Tories is just complete nonsense.

Indeed, even if it were the case that such a difference in consciousness and combativity was present in the class, then it would still not be right to split the TUC. Although divisions in trade union federations are much less disastrous than splitting trade unions themselves, all the standard arguments against the setting up of 'red unions' apply to the TUC as well.

To split a trade union federation allows the employers the opportunity of playing one group off against the other. And the exit of the left into its own little militant federation simply hands over the rest of the workers to the wiles of the right wing bureaucrats.

In fact, upsurges in working class militancy are generally accompanied by powerful pressures towards trade union unity. The wave of working class struggle in France in 1936 led not only to a growth of trade unionism but also the creation of a unified federation. It was the CIA and the Catholic Church, in the 1940's, that split up the unified organisation in the interests of the Cold War.

Broad Lefts

The other patent left wing recipe for easy success that is floating around in the wake of defeat—the need to elect just a few more left wing trade union leaders and everything will be wonderful—was also shown to be nonsense.

Brian Stanley, of the POEU, voted to support Len Murray. He, of course, represents the union in which the Broad Left had both its most resounding electoral victory and its most obviously disastrous defeat in struggle. He was not alone. Other 'leftists' like Morton of the Musicians and Wood of UCAIT backed Murray.

Broad Left 'control' of a union is no guarantee that in moments of struggle it will cast its vote the right, or rather the left, way.

All of the conference resolutions and all of the electoral successes in the world are worth absolutely nothing unless they can be turned into action in the class struggle.

Not only were those pillars of the left who voted to support the NGA actually quite unable to deliver anything at all in the struggle—not even a substantial number of pickets, let alone strike action—but some of their very close friends were to be found voting the other way.

In terms of struggle, the Broad Lefts could deliver nothing for the NGA. But even in their own terms of votes and resolutions they failed to deliver. What is the use of a leadership which mouths left phrases in periods of peace and then promptly deserts to the right in moments of crisis?

The idea that the left can take control of unions without, or even against, the mood of the membership and without having their active involvement in struggle is a nonsense. The TUC has just proved that it is a dangerous nonsense.

If the NGA battle illustrates one thing, it is that there are no short cuts to victory in the downturn.

Any attempt to learn real lessons from this defeat must do more than simply record the failures. It must also point to ways in which things could have been different and ways in which militants can act in the future to try to make sure that they are.

The starting point, then, is a clear recognition that the overall period is one of retreat and defeat for the movement but that it is not one of catastrophe.

Such an assessment, however, only means that victory is difficult. It most certainly does not mean that it is impossible. There is always a danger that militants recognise the reality that we are on the defensive and then think only of how they can run away and hide, rather than looking either for ways of stiffening resistance or of turning the tide.

What the whole dispute showed, and what the mass picket at Warrington showed, was that, whatever the mood overall amongst workers, there is a substantial layer of trade union activists who want some avenue to get back at the Tories and who are very bitter and very keen to fight.

In the longer term, of course, this means that the people who will lead the battles of the upturn are already being formed in the downturn, and because they are products of exactly that period they are much more open to the idea of generalising than that generation of militants who learnt their politics in the days when you could win substantial gains in one factory or even in one shop.

In the shorter term, it showed that had the work been done then at the very least there were, in factories and offices all over the country, people who were prepared to see the dispute as an important one and prepared to argue for solidarity action. They were not the mass of workers, but they did, and do, exist.

And it is in terms of relating to those people that the dispute could have been different. Had the NGA rank and file, or better even the union as a whole, been prepared to fight their battle in terms of its general importance, then those people could have been reached and organised. There was

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at least a chance that the mass of workers might have been won to solidarity action.

That would have meant responding to the first fine as strongly as possible—keeping Fleet Street out for more than the token action and using it as a base to spread the action at first to the rest of the print and then if possible beyond that to other groups of workers.

Such a perspective would only be possible if printers were prepared to act in just the same way as hospital workers were eighteen months ago: go out and have the argument with other rank and file workers about why the struggle mattered, why the TV was lying and why they should come out in support.

No guarantees

No one is pretending that such a strategy would have been easy or that it would have guaranteed success, but at the very least it would have had a chance of winning and it would certainly have made it quite impossible for the TUC to squash the action without even working up a sweat.

That is what could have happened. The reason it did not illustrates perfectly the most important lesson to be drawn from the dispute.

Given that the official union machines were not prepared to mobilise in such a way any such perspective falls on the shoulders of unofficial militants. The lesson of this dispute is that such an *organised* layer does not exist today.

In the early 1970's the CP-led Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions played a vital role in organising the unofficial layer. That layer was much bigger and much more confident than it is now, and it had a much healthier relationship with the mass of workers, but even then it did not mobilise itself. Even though the basic perspective of the Liaison Committee was 'to put pressure' on the TUC it did that by means of organising unofficial action — on one occasion an unofficial one day strike involving more than half a million workers.

The political successors of the Liaison Committee, the various Broad Lefts, have shown time and again that they are neither interested in nor organised for such a role. They share the Liaison Committee obsession with the official movement without its saving grace of recognising the remarkable persuasive powers that unofficial action can exert upon the bureaucratic mind. In the NGA disputes the various broad left groupings played no role of organising.

Virtually the only organised force arguing for a perspective based on the rank and file were the members and supporters of the SWP. Any honest account must recognise that, for example, the mass picket at Warrington on the climactic Tuesday night consisted largely of people from inside the print mobilised by the NGA and from outside the print mobilised by the SWP.

In one way that can be a source of pride and satisfaction to readers of this magazine: at least some people can see how to relate to the class struggle. But at a more general level, of course, it is rather more a source for sober reflection. By no stretch of the imagination is

our political tendency large enough or deeply embedded enough in the decisive sections of the working class to act as a *substantial* opposition to the inertia and treachery of the bureaucracy. Ultimately, at Warrington and at Congress House they were the ones who called the shots.

At the very crudest level, the real balance of forces meant that, in mobilising for the mass picket, those militants who were in touch with us could find transport. The vast majority who are not had either to stumble across an NGA coach, make their own way there, or more likely, sit at home and derive whatever vicarious political satisfaction could be gleaned from watching *Newsnight*.

And that is what can be said of the mass picket, which was the soft option of the dispute since it was an activity open to even the militant who is in a minority of one at work. In terms of the decisive battle, the winning of solidarity action at work, the scale of the task was so much greater than our own forces that we were unable to do little more than propagandise.

The reality is that in the present period only a political organisation can sustain a protracted intervention in the class struggle and only a revolutionary party can even begin to have the sort of orientation on the workplace that is necessary. Even in terms of winning quite elementary class battles the present period is one in which revolutionary politics and revolutionary organisation are vital.

But even if the scale of the tasks seems

daunting, then there are other, more heartening lessons to be drawn from the struggle. Brief though it was, the NGA dispute was a real conflict with the government and it was one which enthused large numbers of people.

The very suddenness of the dispute illustrated the fact that even the depths of a downturn are broken by periodic upsurges in the class struggle. These are never predictable and they do not run according to some pre-set plan. It requires a great deal of tactical flexibility to be able to relate to such sudden flare-ups during a period in which, like it or not, revolutionaries are forced to spend much of their time talking to a very small number of people.

No one can say whether a resounding victory in a struggle like the recent NGA dispute would change the overall mood of the class and signal the end of the downturn. But we do know that in such flare ups of struggle it is possible to see a dim picture of the future. The steady work of paper selling and contact visiting and political education which is of necessity the staple of a revolutionary socialist organisation in the present period bear fruit in such a dispute. The audience for revolutionary ideas suddenly become very much larger and very much more interested in an active commitment to changing the world.

That is the final, hopeful lesson of the dispute. It was a small rehearsal for the upturn, and it looked pretty good for building a socialist organisation.



The mass picket at Warrington on 29 November

Broad Left disaster

One of the lessons that some people are drawing from the recent treachery of the TUC is that what we need is more 'left wing leaders'. J Jones writes about just how well left leaders have performed in the POEU.

It is not just the NGA that the courts have been seen to discipline. The POEU's campaign of industrial action against Mercury and privatisation has ended in abject retreat. After having first agreed to abide by the court injunctions to stop sanctions against Mercury, the Broad Left dominated execu-

utive have now gone the whole hog and called off *all* industrial action against privatisation as well.

Faced with the decision whether or not to defy the court injunction over Mercury, the Broad Left on the executive split, with Mic Caddie, Charlie Love, Doug Rafferty, and Tony Young voting with the right wing.

Such was the schizophrenic nature of many Broad Left activists that the day after this dismal retreat the POEU Conference ended on a 'high', with dramatic donations of money to the fighting fund, and to complete the pantomime atmosphere Bryan Stanley (POEU general secretary) in tears.

The euphoria came because of the Conference's unanimous decision to support the

executive's recommendation to 'carry on the fight' against privatisation despite the reverse over Mercury.

The decision was to carry on with a three-pronged campaign — a 'trident' Stanley called it — of selective industrial action, publicity, and parliamentary action.

Within three days, by Tuesday 15 November, the executive were to show their real mettle. They decided to call off all industrial action other than that being taken in the International division. They immediately delegated the task of negotiating terms for a resumption of work to Bryan Stanley and other national officials.

After much huffing and puffing, terms were agreed by the NEC on 22 November. These were in 'return' for management agreeing to a return to work on 5 December of all strikers and suspended members. The management would have the right to operate changes in manning levels and job locations that they had found necessary during the dispute. Within the week the same terms were agreed for the International division as well — it was total surrender.

Since the return to work management have been able to use the agreed terms to carve up and weaken the very sections of the POEU that carried the selective action on behalf of the whole union. It has given the management the opportunity to rationalise many jobs and, in the process, separate off branch officers and militants into new, invariably smaller, work units.

Computerisation

In the Circuit Provision group in London Central Branch, for example, management introduced computerisation during the selective action. The POEU branch had previously been refusing to co-operate. This has now meant the relocation of half the previous workforce.

In the London North Central (Internal) Branch, the previous 24-hour shift rota in the Fleet Telex Exchange has had two shift cuts, with the staff relocated on different work minus their shift allowance.

In Liverpool (Internal) Branch, the PABX Maintenance Group has been redeployed, including six technical officers that supported the previous selective action. All round the management have been able to chop, redeploy, computerise — in sum, weaken union organisation and establish tighter managerial control. On resumption of working every member got a personal letter threatening the sack if any further action takes place.

The Internal Exchange workers were also hammered on their return one week later. They went back to find computerised projects replacing closed-down shifts. A hundred International staff have been taken off shifts, with consequent massive wage cuts — averaging £5,000 a year!

So much for the power of selective action! The POEU's 'three-pronged' campaign is now reduced to handing out leaflets in shopping precincts and a few boring, unnoticed speeches by some Labour MPs late at night in the House. The selective industrial action has finished up as management selective



Telecoms workers picketing the Bank of England in April 1983



POEU 1983 Conference: John Scott Garner, president, with general secretary Bryan Stanley

victimisation.

The supposedly 'controlling' Broad Left grouping put up *less* of a fight than an avowedly right wing trade union leader like Joe Wade of the NGA.

In the final analysis Joe Wade was privately happy to hide behind the cowardice of the TUC general council and the treachery of Len Murray. But the POEU Broad Left, after splitting, has ended up just as impotent.

Sections of the trade union bureaucracy fight and sell out in proportion to the pressures put on them. These pressures are from the courts and the state, the employers, their own privileged position, and finally from their own membership.

Such pressures invariably outweigh the formally-stated differences between 'moderates' and 'broad lefts'. How else can it be explained, for example, that a right wing leader like Joe Gormley found himself at the head of two successful national miners' strikes, the last one in 1974 bringing down the Heath government, while Broad Left leader Arthur Scargill, since being an NUM full time official, has not led one strike, although he has denounced several unofficial ones!

Broad Left schizophrenia is accompanied by convenient bouts of amnesia when it comes to such examples.

Unofficial action

In the POEU much of the Broad Left's own post mortem into their own defeat has been understandably directed against the four renegades who initially voted with the right on the NEC. Jack London likened a scab to a lower form of life than a snake's belly; no doubt many POEU militants think snakes rather pleasant creatures in comparison with messrs Caddie, Love, Rafferty and Young.

At the Broad Left meeting on 12 December it was agreed to withdraw these

four from next year's slate. This was only right and proper although, somewhat surprisingly, 23 out of the 100 present still voted to keep the four on the slate. Less surprisingly, the 23 comprised mainly Communist Party members and their fellow travellers.

However we must look further than the weakness of four individuals for the underlying cause of the defeat — and the key to that is the political weakness of the Broad Left strategy itself.

In June of this year the POEU Broad Left reversed the 14-9 right wing dominance of the NEC to 14-9 in favour of the Broad Left. The 14 are mainly 'Bennite' Labour lefts, two are CP members, and two are supporters of *Militant*.

This was heralded as a breakthrough, and Broad Left activists were encouraged to trust the new left-led executive.

At Broad Left meetings there has been verbal support for a more 'rank and file' orientation. In practice the Broad Left machine was reliant on a bureaucratised POEU branch structure, next to no unofficial traditions, and tactical reliance on the supposed power of selective action. There was no preparation within the rank and file to counter the eventual (we would argue inevitable) sell out by some or all of the executive.

Prior to the 1978 POEU dispute — against connection of new electronic exchange equipment — that resulted in a partial victory with the 37½ hour week, there was some unofficial action in the City and North Central Branches. But by and large the POEU is dominated nationally by appointed full-time officials, and at local level by 100 percent facility-time branch officers and a branch committee structure that owes more to its origins in joint management/union committees from the Whitley Council days than to any sectionally accountable shop stewards' organisation. The executive is

electd by the union's annual conference, ie by branch delegates who are overwhelmingly branch officers.

It is a structure that suited a Broad Left electoral strategy well. With only 400 paid-up Broad Left members out of a union membership of 132,000, an efficient machine for a united slate was able to wield sufficient branch block votes at conference to beat the right's machine, 'Mainstream'.

Selective action

However, electoral machines do not win members to the need for all-out strikes. When it came to the crucial question of how to fight, the Broad Left limply moved an amendment seeking to widen selective targets to include stockbrokers as well! There was no recognition by the Broad Left that you cannot beat a central plank of Tory policy with selective action.

The Broad Left strategy is not just a prisoner of four renegades. It is shackled by the reformist illusion that leadership means control of the union machine, particularly the executive. It is also limited by the reformist sense of tactics that sees militancy more in terms of disciplined loyalty to a 'left' leadership than in the development of rank and file self-confidence.

At last week's national POEU Broad Left meeting, the members present took over five hours to debate, and finally agree by a majority vote, to dump the four renegades from their slate. It took so long because some wanted to defend 'broad unity' by still keeping the four, and because a different, smaller minority argued that the whole Broad Left strategy of electoralism and selective action was in question.

It is up to SWP members both within and outside the POEU to carry that minority view to militants within the POEU, and carry it beyond the small caucus world of Broad Left machines.



Playing the bosses' game: the TUC General Council at Blackpool in 1983

Why the bureaucrats betray

The term 'bureaucrat' is not just a term of abuse in the workers' movement. It refers to a very definite layer of people with very definite patterns of behaviour. We need to be precise about the term because our attitude to the trade union bureaucracy is a result of our analysis of their position.

The term 'trade union bureaucrat' refers to a layer of people who are professionally engaged in the running of trade unions and who derive their living from that job.

This category does not include people like the secretaries who type the letters and the people who work the computers. They work for the union just like they would work for any other employer.

The trade union bureaucrat thus has a different social position from that of the rank and file worker. For the ordinary worker, it is necessary that he or she sells their labour power to a capitalist. Their immediate material interest is bound up with making sure they get the maximum possible in return for that sale.

The trade union bureaucrat, on the other hand, also depends on a money wage, but it is gained from the union, not from a capitalist. The bureaucrat's future, and the possibility of wage rises, is bound up with the continuation of the union as an employer.

So while workers, whether they like it or not, are constantly driven to fight the

The twists and turns of the TUC and the NGA leadership have focussed attention on the trade union bureaucrats. Jane Kaye analyses their role.

capitalist class in order to ensure they obtain a living wage, the trade union bureaucrat is constantly driven to maintain the existence of the trade union.

At the most basic level, this social position explains why the trade union bureaucracy vacillates in the class struggle. Unions perform a vital function under capitalism, they are essential if workers are to meet their class enemy on anything like equal terms.

Their purpose is to sell the one commodity over which workers have any control — labour power — at the best possible price. All they can do therefore is modify the terms of exploitation, not abolish it. In so doing, they implicitly accept the continuation of the labour market. Their *aims* are bounded by the horizons of capitalist society, although their *methods* — workers' power — point beyond.

As the Italian revolutionary Gramsci put it in 1919, examining the upsurge of trade

union struggle in the Turin factories:

'Trade unionism is evidently nothing but a reflection of capitalist society, not a potential means of transcending capitalist society. It organises workers, not as producers but as wage-earners, that is as creations of the capitalist system of private property, as sellers of their labour power. Unionism unites workers according to the tools of their trade or the nature of their product, that is according to the contours imposed on them by the capitalist system.'

But in the course of their struggles to build and use unions workers come up against the limits of the capitalist system and at least some of them see the possibility of abolishing the private ownership of the means of production and therefore getting rid of the need for wage bargaining. The trade union bureaucrat, however, needs the *continuation* of wage slavery, for without it he or she has no future.

The limits to the ideas of trade union bureaucrats are thus determined by their social situation. On the one hand they need to maintain the existence of workers' organisations in order both to keep themselves employed and to sustain their importance to society. On the other hand they have no interest in getting rid of capitalism because that would ultimately do them out of a job.

Consequently they have two main enemies. They are prepared to fight against those employers who will not recognise trade unions and against those governments which attempt to place heavy legal constraints on union activity. But they also hate those workers who want to change the system and who try to use revolutionary methods of mass activity in order even to fight within the system.

The trade union bureaucrat is thus under contradictory pressures. On the one hand it is important that they deliver at least some results to their members: unless they can do that there is a risk they will be replaced by somebody else. But they also suffer pressure from the employers who want a controlled labour force and nice tidy settlements. And because they are subject to contradictory pressures the bureaucrats vacillate.

The separate social situation of the bureaucracy renders them very different from their members. For one thing, they develop a set of skills, and even a special language, that are appropriate to running a union and negotiating with employers. They tend to see themselves as the people who really make things tick in the union and to develop a distance from the members they represent.

Skills and perks

In the early days of the trade unions this was very easy to see. The skills needed even to run a modest union operation include elementary book-keeping and a certain facility with reading and writing. Even today these are not part of the common equipment of every worker and a century ago often had to be learnt specially for the union.

Today, of course, the skills are more likely to be in the area of recondite knowledge of different acts of parliament concerning workplace conditions, detailed wage agreements and elaborate grievance procedures, but knowing all about them is something which separates the bureaucrat off from the ordinary worker.

It is also likely to be the case that the trade union bureaucrat is much better off than the workers he or she represents. Even when wages are not grossly inflated, as they are in some white collar unions which pay their officials salaries equivalent to those of the most senior grades which the unions organise, the fact that wages come from the union means they will tend to be paid much more regularly than those of the members. And short of the union going bust, the wages will not be interrupted by little problems like strikes or lockouts.

On top of that, the bureaucrat will get all sorts of perks. At the very least he or she will be removed from the hazards and debilitation consequent upon working. The boiler suit will be exchanged for the Burton's suit. A list of other perks follow, getting more elaborate the further the bureaucrat rises in the career ladder. Starting with the office, the list will add secretary, car, chauffeur, expense account, long lunches with employers or industrial journalists, autobiographies — a million things which add up to the daily life of a bureaucrat and which are a million

miles away from the workers on the shop floor.

These perks and privileges have long been recognised as part of the job of a trade union bureaucrat. The Webbs, writing 90 years ago in a classic work on trade unionism, were very much in favour of bureaucrats, and devoted many pages to justifying how and why they should be different from 'ordinary' workers. They reminded those average workers who complained about the wages of the officials that:

'What he has to compare the Secretary's salary with is not the weekly wage of the manual working members of the Union, but...the remuneration given...for the kind of work that the Secretary has to perform. When we remember that the modern Trade Union official has to be constantly travelling and consorting with employers and officials of much higher standards of expenditure than his own, and when we realise the magnitude and financial importance of the work that he performs, the smallness of the salary and the lack of courtesy and amenity accorded to the office is almost ludicrous.'

The bureaucrat tends to become socially more and more removed from the ordinary workers and, at the same time, to spend more and more time with the ruling class and its close servants. Sometimes, this is a conscious strategy on the part of the employers, who set out to establish good personal relations with trade union officials in order to get them to 'understand the management point of view'.

The most famous example of that sort of thing was when the members of the first Labour government got dressed up in full court dress to go and see the King upon taking office, but the same sort of process of absorption into the ruling class has taken place on a million less well-publicised occasions.

We can see where that process leads the most unscrupulous trade union bureaucrats by looking at their career patterns. Lord Marsh, chairman of the NPA and god knows what else, began his political life as a trade union official. He is now, without doubt, fully absorbed into the capitalist class.

Not all trade union bureaucrats go so far, some because they have less to sell and others because they have slightly more principle, but even those on the left absorb the norms of the enemy class. Hugh Scanlon, fire-breathing militant of the left, is now the good Lord Scanlon and his terrible twin is now Jack Jones, Companion of Honour.

The final problem for the trade union bureaucrat is that he or she depends for their social position upon the continued sectionalism of the class. Trade union organisation reflects the fragmented nature of the working class in the process of production, divided trade against trade, factory against factory, and so on.

This is particularly true in Britain, where the basic structure of the trade union movement grew out of the divisions in the working class existing around 100 years ago. Thus if we look at the AUEW we find that within that umbrella there are four distinct sections — engineering, foundry, construction and

white collar — all reflecting different divisions inside the working class movement.

And if we look inside just one section, engineering, we find that this is further sectionalised — in particular between skilled men on the one hand and women and unskilled men on the other, who are actually holders of a union card of a different colour, entitling them to different benefits than the skilled male engineer. And we also find that the skilled men, descendants of the original craftsmen who founded the union more than 100 years ago, actually tend to be the dominating voice and force in the union.

If we look at another union, the TGWU, which issued not out of skilled workers but out of the attempts to organise the unskilled, we again find that within an apparently united union there are a series of 'trade groups', each with its executives and fulltime officials.

Divisions preserved

The structure of the British trade union movement reflects all of these sectional divisions and so too do the officials. And while the interests of groups of workers in struggle constantly force them to try to overcome the boundaries of sectionalism — asking for blacking, getting solidarity action, raising money etc — the interests of the trade union bureaucrat are bound up in the continuation of the sectionalism. If there were no such divisions, not only would it be difficult to play one group off against another, but there would be that many fewer jobs for general secretaries.

There are certainly pressures towards bigger unions which may seem to contradict the notion that the bureaucracy seeks to perpetuate sectionalism. Particularly since jobs started to disappear rapidly, many bureaucrats seem very keen on union mergers.

But a look at the unions which come out of mergers shows the continuation of sectionalism within the new unions. The TGWU's structure of trade groups arose precisely out of amalgamations. The recent merger between NATSOPA and SOGAT has resulted in the typical situation where the bureaucracy has merged but the membership hasn't achieved a united organisation. The interests of the bureaucracy are to maintain sectionalism and they are usually successful, unless the rank and file is able decisively to affect the process.

Although that defence of sectionalism might be couched in terms of appeals to the glorious traditions of the craft or some such nonsense it is the interests of the bureaucrats that are at the heart of the matter. The decade-long problem of the merger of the Engineering and Technical and Supervisory sections of the AUEW is the classic example.

The engineering section, under both left and right wing leaders, has maintained a constitution which has a much higher degree of democracy than most unions. For example, all full-time officials are subject both to election and to regular re-election. The system is not perfect, but it is clearly vastly superior to the practice of appointing officials for life.

The white collar section, TASS, has a system of appointing officials. It is also much



Bill Sirs and Moss Evans posing at Brighton

more formally left wing than the engineering section. While the process of democratic election meant that the Broad Left lost control of the engineering section after Scanlon went, the non-elected officials of TASS, led by CP member Ken Gill, kept control of their section for the 'left'.

What's more, they opposed a merger with the engineering section precisely on the grounds that the terms included the election of officials. They were, presumably, frightened they might lose their jobs. And thus even 'left' bureaucrats put their own interests before those of overcoming the sectionalism of the trade union movement.

Thus the trade union bureaucracy is a definite social layer with material interests of its own quite different from those of the workers it claims to merely 'represent'. Those interests do require that it at least to a certain extent articulates workers' grievances, but they also mean that when it comes to the crunch the union bureaucracy acts so as to defend the existing capitalist system.

To put things as bluntly as that prompts an obvious question: What about the *political differences* between different union officials? In particular what about the differences between right and left officials?

Those differences can seem very big. To most union activists today it must seem strange to lump Frank Chapple and Arthur Scargill together as members of a distinct social group with its own interests. And so it has seemed to previous generations of union activists. But when one looks at how previous generations of 'left' and 'right' union officials have actually *behaved* in the past then the interests they have in common turn out to be a far more decisive factor in governing what they actually did than the rhetoric that separated them.

Take the case of the General Strike of 1926. The top of the trade union movement was at least as divided in terms of rhetoric as it is now, perhaps even more so. On the one hand there were notorious right wingers like railwaymen's leader Jimmy Thomas. 'I'm here to see there's no mucking about with the

British Empire,' had been his opening words to civil servants when he had done a short spell as Colonial Secretary two years before.

On the other hand there was a cluster of apparently very left union leaders like Purcell of the furniture workers or Alonso Swales of the engineers. In 1925, when he had been TUC president, Swales had addressed Congress in the following ringing terms:

'We are entering upon a new stage of development in the upward struggle of our class...The new phase of development, which is world wide, has entered on the next and probably the last stage of revolt. It is the duty of all members of the working class so to solidify their movements, that, come when the time may for the last final struggle, we shall be wanting neither machinery nor men to move forward to the destruction of wage-slavery and the construction of a new order to society based upon co-ordinated effort and work with mutual goodwill and understanding.'

What happened to these apparently huge differences between left and right leaders when it came to the decisive events of the General Strike?

Left and right as one

First, note that (with a couple of minor exceptions) all the right-wing leaders went along with the strike call. The pressure from the rank and file of the miners (far more important numerically then than now) and from the rank and file in general was sufficient to ensure that.

But when the time came, Swales, Purcell and all the other lefts on the General Council voted with the right to end the strike. Why? They could not plead in their defence that the strike had proved a failure in terms of support (more people were out on the last day than on the first). The answer can be found in their attitude to struggle. They were as scared as the right that on the ground — where it counted — leadership might fall into the hands of wild extremists.

Purcell, for example, the left leader of the furniture workers, who had talked of defeating capitalism through strike action in 1924, was chairman of the crucial Strike Organising Committee. But instead of practising what he preached, he let the chief role of the committee be to damp down class warfare. As one historian has written:

'It was feared that in some provincial towns and cities extreme left wing elements might take control and conduct the strike as a purely political affair. Hence the Strike Organising Committee tried from the first to maintain a control over provincial activity which was simply unworkable.'

Whether or not to conduct the strike as a purely political affair was the decisive question. The left might talk about the destruction of wage slavery, but that was when the *political* possibility of so doing had not yet arisen. The moment it did, and exactly when the General Strike could not be kept within the bounds of 'normal', economic class struggle (not least because the government wouldn't permit it), the left dropped any such talk.

In practice, they did not disagree with the sentiments expressed by arch right winger Clynes of the TGWU: 'I am not in fear of the capitalist class. The only class I fear is our own.' If control were to pass into the hands of the rank and file, would even left-wing bureaucrats be safe?

So in both the calling off of the General Strike and even more in its betrayal the differences between left and right among the officials counted for far less than their common interests as members of the same social layer.

It should also be noted that the one left leader who did managed to preserve some reputation for posterity out of the General Strike was miners' secretary A J Cook. But he did so in common with the other *more right wing* miners' officials who *all* faced sufficient direct pressure from their members to have to fight on alone for six months after the betrayal.

What counted, then, in the way the officials behaved was their own special interests as members of the union bureaucracy and the particular pressures of the class struggle. The differences between left and right among the officials weighed in a very poor third to these.

Yet it is precisely on this poor third that the Broad Left's strategy is focused. For the advocates of the Broad Left strategy are quite oblivious to the fact that it is something in the social position of union officials that leads to 'sellouts'. In the Broad Left strategy 'sellouts' are the result of right-wing ideas or naked corruption. Put an honest left winger in, and then the only problem is the rank and file not following him or her.

The fact is that this strategy has been tried time and again and it always results in a sellout by the leaders. The ideas in someone's head, rank and file worker or trade union bureaucrat or whoever, are the result of their material situation and they change when that situation changes. The trade union bureaucrat is in a position in which compromise is part of the job, so their ideas become those of compromise.

It is for this reason, incidentally, that reformist political organisations like the Labour Party are the natural home of the trade union bureaucrat. The idea that you can, by reason and negotiation, change things for the better is the obvious political complement to the idea that it is bargaining skills that determine the outcome of a conflict between workers and bosses.

It is because we believe that the trade union bureaucracy is a special social layer that we in the Socialist Workers Party have followed the revolutionary tradition of adopting a 'rank and file' strategy.

That strategy argues that it is the material conditions of the working class that force it into conflict with the ruling class and out of that conflict the consciousness and the power to change the world are born. Trade unions are one of the central forms of that struggle; the class which cannot defend itself against capitalism is not likely to be able to overthrow capitalism.

We are therefore concerned to fight to make sure that unions are as far as possible organised to reflect the needs and interests of their members. Since these are necessarily different from those of trade union bureaucrats there is certain to be a conflict between the rank and file and the bureaucracy. At times this will be grumbling discontent and at times open warfare.

We did not invent this conflict. Bob Holton, the historian of 'syndicalism' in the period before the First World War, described its rise in the following terms:

'Grievances centred on the growing remoteness of officials from shop-floor problems as bargaining machinery, increasingly national in scope, was extended through a wide range of industries... To many it appeared that the incorporation of union officials within bargaining institutions had succeeded in defusing their earlier radicalism. Official policies tended to become more cautious and conservative, as the consolidation of the union's bureaucratic strength took precedence over demands for radical social change.

'Officials relished their recently expanded bargaining status in respect of management and were increasingly

unwilling to jeopardise collective bargaining recognition by agreeing to direct action.'

The resentment has not diminished over the years.

Unlike the syndicalists, however, we do not believe that industrial organisation and militancy alone are enough. We want to change the unions as part of a more general fight to build a socialist party that can lead a revolution. But the fight to change the unions is important.

At one level it is very easy to be clear about how the union should be changed. It is simple to draw up a list saying that officials should be elected and subject to recall; that they should be paid the average wage of their members; that all decisions should be taken by elected bodies etc, etc. Putting those ideas into practice is rather more difficult.

Limits of bureaucracy

We can see just how difficult if we ask ourselves just where the trade union bureaucracy ends. Obviously it includes all of the full-time employees of the union responsible for the 'negotiating side'.

But what about full-time convenors?

They have many of the features of the trade union bureaucrat. They have different material conditions than the members they represent. They are not paid by the union, but their position does depend upon the continuation of trade union organisation in the plant. On the other hand, they are much more vulnerable than most real bureaucrats. They are usually forced to go through at least the formality of regular election. They will

lose their job if the factory closes. They are liable to get victimised in any management offensive. The truth is that both they and other rather less privileged activists are not properly people who are members of the trade union bureaucracy, but they are very vulnerable to the political attraction of the bureaucracy. The extent to which they capitulate to those pressures is not a matter of moral fibre but of the state of the class struggle.

In the present period, for example, the level of rank and file self-activity is so low that the bureaucracy puts enormous pressure not just on the people who share a little of their privileges but also on almost any trade union activist. Even to fight over something like a personal case on behalf of a member often involves the activist having to rely very heavily on the bureaucracy for advice and support, for the simple reason that a weak and inactive rank and file provides no alternative strategy.

In other periods, for example ones of intense class struggle, the balance of forces is quite different and the rank and file can exert strong control over their representatives.

It is for this reason that the core of any rank and file strategy has to be made up of people who are politically organised and conscious. In some periods, the level of class struggle will propel large numbers of people into conflict with the ruling class and thus into conflict with the trade union bureaucrats who try to mediate between the classes. At other times it will only be a tiny minority of people who understand the role of the bureaucrat.

In both cases the continuity and clarity is provided by people who have an understanding of why it is that the bureaucrats behave the way they do and how to fight them. Those people are ones who have absorbed a Marxist understanding of the world.

In the present period that general truth has a particular importance: the pressure to capitulate to the bureaucracy is so great, and so much part of the daily life of the trade union militant, that only people under a very strong counter pressure — the discipline of a revolutionary party — will survive as opponents of the bureaucracy.

'Trust me, I'm your trade union leader.'
Lord Scanlon, formerly the firebrand
of the trade union left



Workers pay the price

Andy Durgan looks at the record of the Spanish Socialist Party's first year in government.

On 28 October 1982 Spain's first ever all-Socialist Party (PSOE) government came to power with a landslide victory.

Despite having an absolute majority in parliament the PSOE has been quite incapable, if not unwilling, to do anything that would upset the status quo. They have the dubious honour of being Europe's most right wing social democratic party. As demonstrating steelworkers so aptly put it 'Felipe, Guerra (deputy leader), the change is a load of shit' (*el cambio es una mierda*).

The PSOE government's economic policy has a familiar ring about it and would make Thatcher proud. One right wing MP, Juan Arespachoga, has complained that it was 'quite unfair of the socialists to rob our economic policies'. Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez has established very cosy relations with the Spanish employers' federation, the CEOE, which has led its president Carlos Ferrer Salat to describe the new government as 'more flexible' than its right wing predecessor.

Earlier this year it looked as if the cynics might be proved wrong when the government nationalised the country's most important group of companies, the gigantic Rumasa corporation, to avoid its imminent bankruptcy harming the economy. This measure was welcomed by the trade unions, the Communist Party and even the Trotskyist LCR. However, the true nature of this 'nationalisation' was soon made clear as the government promised to return the viable parts of Rumasa's 400 companies, and in particular its 18 banks, to private hands 'as soon as possible'. As Gonzalez explained to assorted political leaders and businessmen in New York last June: 'nationalisations are an anachronism'. He then proceeded to attack his French 'comrades' for having carried through such measures.

Promises ditched

The crux of the government's latest economic plan is designed 'to encourage investment in the private sector'. Workers are suffering the effects of such economic 'solutions' in the form of mass unemployment throughout the world.

Even the few meagre promises of their election programme—a document that makes even Neil Kinnock look positively revolutionary—have more or less all been ditched. Their central commitment to create 800,000 jobs has now been recognised by economic minister, Carlos Solchaga, as being 'virtually impossible'. Investment in the public sector, which was supposed to

rise, has fallen by 1.4 percent. Wages are planned to *fall* by 8 percent in real terms in the next two years despite prices rising by 15 percent this year alone. Legislation for guaranteeing a 40 hour week has been sabotaged by the refusal of employers to collaborate. Plans for the rationalising of industry will certainly lead to an increase in the country's two million plus *registered* unemployed (about 15 percent of the workforce).

The government also intends to cut unemployment benefit, which, as it is, is only received by about 30 percent of those out of work. For those in work the equivalent of 'national insurance payments' are to be increased, while the employers' contribution will be reduced. The PSOE are going to modify employment legislation which will result in even less job security for most workers.

The most shameful of the PSOE's attacks on the working class has been their plan to rationalise the steel industry. In Sagunto, near Valencia, the proposed 2-3,000 redundancies will lead to the death of the local community. The workers however are not prepared to take this lying down and despite the unfavourable atmosphere have been waging a fierce campaign of strikes and direct action over the last year. For left militants Sagunto is a symbol of resistance that needs urgently to be spread to other sections of the class.

Union inaction

Predictably, these across-the-board attacks on working class living standards have met with no opposition from the socialist trade union federation, the UGT. The communist Workers' Commissions have made some token protests but are more worried about being excluded from discussions between the government, the UGT and the CEOE than organising effective opposition. Not that the government has repaid the UGT's loyalty. They have refused to discuss general economic policies with the union (TUC-Labour style), only wage controls.

Like their predecessors, the PSOE haven't been prepared to alter the state apparatus inherited from Francoism. Right from the start they have gone out of their way to placate the army and the police forces. Defence spending will remain at over 20 percent of total state expenditure, one of the highest in Europe. It was no coincidence that Gonzalez' first public engagement was to visit the crack motorized Acorazada division.

Defence minister Narciso Serra praised the army for 'their important contribution to the transition to democracy'! (One can only suppose this is a reference to the fact that the army were kind enough *not* to organise a coup.) He soon showed off the fact that he had learnt the 'Infantry Hymn' as part of his

new job. What's more, the PSOE haven't reinstated those officers dismissed from the army in the mid-seventies for being members of the Democratic Military Union. The PSOE supported them then.

The army seems pleasantly surprised by the Socialist administration and the amount of sabre rattling has, if anything, decreased in recent months. Such is the PSOE's love affair with the army that following the recent killing of an army captain by ETA politico-militar they proposed the slogan 'Against ETA, with the Army' for the anti-terrorist demonstration in Bilbao.

Law and order

But it is in the defence of law and order that the Socialist government has surpassed itself. Under their administration repression has continued as before, if not increased. In recent weeks, in response to more armed activity in the Basque Country, the government has announced a further strengthening of anti-terrorist legislation.

The minister of the interior Jose Barrionuevo has a suitably murky Francoist past. Even Gonzalez described him as having a 'repressor's face'. One of his first public engagements was to attend a Civil Guard function where he made no secret about his sympathies, ending his speech by shouting: 'Long live the Civil Guard!'. This is no surprise coming from a man who has stated that: 'In the war against terrorism it's better to be polite and look the other way...this is how results are achieved.'

His advice that terrorists should be 'dealt with like mad dogs' has certainly not been missed by his police force. Within days of his appointment police shot down unarmed GRAPO leader Martin Luna in Barcelona without a word said. Barrionuevo was quick to express his approval of this kind of operation.

The main centre of radical opposition to the government remains the Basque Country. Apart from outright repression, the local socialists have worked hard to demonstrate their loyalty to the concept of 'Spanish unity' so beloved of the army and the ultra right. One PSOE leader summed up their attitude when he stated that: 'The only left (in the Basque Country) is that inside the Socialist Party, the rest is a problem for the Civil Guard.'

Political demoralisation, and the national swing towards them, allowed the PSOE to make significant gains in the local elections last May, often at the expense of the radical nationalist Herri Batasuna. The socialists have quite unashamedly used this to attempt to drive a wedge between Basque and non-Basque workers in order to isolate ETA's supporters. This policy was brought to a head in the summer in the so-called 'war of the flags'.

The PSOE insisted during local festivals that, contrary to the practice in recent years, the Spanish flag should accompany the Basque flag outside town halls in accordance with the constitution. Predictably this met with a hostile reaction in many areas. There then followed a whole series of cases where the Civil Guard and riot police occupied town halls to enforce the PSOE's decision.



This struggle reached grotesque proportions in Renteria, an industrial suburb of San Sebastian and historically a pro-ETA stronghold. In May the Socialist Party ousted Herri Batasuna from their control of the local council. In July the PSOE announced their intention to fly the monarchist flag during the summer festival. Given the political atmosphere in the town this could only be the most extreme provocation. On the appointed day a crowd of around 1,000, including children, gathered outside the town hall only to be brutally attacked by about 70 plain clothes policemen wielding coshes, chains and clubs. The ensuing scenes of 'extraordinary violence' according to the pro-government *El Pais* were only too reminiscent of the 'uncontrollables', the gangs of 'off-duty' police who used to terrorize Basque towns in the years following Franco's death.

Opposition

Many people were seriously injured, including one EMK (Basque Communist Movement) member who was blinded. There followed several days of sporadic street fighting between militants and the riot police. The PSOE had made its patriotic point with a vengeance.

From the start Felipe Gonzalez has insisted that the 'unity of Spain is not for discussion'. Those who opposed the PSOE's methods in the Basque Country were, according to the Socialist leader, 'authentic nazis'.

At an international level the PSOE have shown themselves to be, in their own words, 'a faithful ally to the USA'. In his June tour of Latin America such was his grovelling to the US that even the government press in Mexico denounced Gonzalez as an 'imperialist agent'. Opposition to the armed struggle in Central America earned him the warm praise of Reagan, who has described

the new Spanish government as 'young nationalists'.

Closer to home, the Socialist government has refused to honour an agreement they signed in 1977 supporting the Polisario Front's rightful claim to the Western Sahara. Originally they had denounced the Spanish government's support of the invading forces of Morocco and Mauritania and promised to publish secret documents relating to the events. Needless to say, now that they are in government they have conveniently forgotten these promises.

Perhaps the only controversial point of the PSOE's programme was their promise to hold a referendum over Spain's entry into NATO. Prior to the elections the Socialist Party, reflecting the general mood, were supposedly opposed to Spanish entry. Now this opposition has been dropped and the referendum will decide instead 'the manner of Spain's incorporation into the Western defence system'.

The government will now advocate entrance while the PSOE as a party will be able to take a 'separate' position. All this means is that the referendum will continue to be put back until after the celebration of the PSOE's forthcoming congress, where party policy will be officially changed in favour of NATO.

Just to dispel any doubts about their attitude, Gonzalez, while in West Germany, expressed his support for the siting of Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe.

The thoroughly conservative nature of the PSOE government shouldn't surprise anyone. Politically there has been a considerable downturn in the last five years and organised opposition to government and employers is quite limited. The level of trade unionisation continues to drop, and, at less than 10 percent of the workforce, is the lowest in Europe. What's more the PSOE is a purely electoral party with fewer activists and cadres than even most parties of this

type. The diminutive left wing, the Izquierda Socialista, is completely ineffective and has offered no opposition to the party's stampede to the right.

Many opportunist and other doubtful elements, particularly at a local level, have moved in on the chance of an easy job or a position in local government. This is nothing unusual in mass reformist parties, but given the 'newness' of the vast majority of members of the PSOE this is particularly acute. For example among the fifty or so Socialist candidates for Mayor of provincial capitals last May there wasn't one worker. All were male professionals, 25 percent of them lawyers. The majority had joined the party since Franco's death, seven since 1980. This is not because of youth, as most were over 40. Of the handful that had been active against the dictatorship, most had been members of other parties.

Unfortunately not much can be hoped from the main workers' party, the Communist Party. Effectively there is little difference in policy between them and the PSOE and they do not even seem to have the sense to move a few inches to the left to take advantage of anti-government feeling. However, in recent months their increasing marginalisation by the PSOE, along with certain outside pressures, has led them to take a more critical stance against the government in order to win back some of their dwindling support. Moreover the CP are in deep internal crisis. Numbers of leading militants continue to desert to the pro-Soviet groups, by far the most important being the Catalan Communist Party. They are attempting to 're-form' the party nationally. Even the former general secretary, arch-eurocommunist Santiago Carrillo, has found it necessary to resurrect his 'allegiance' to Lenin and the October Revolution in order to try to win back his authority over the party from his equally reformist successors.

Patriotism

There still remain some important focuses of opposition to the government. Apart from the Sagunto steel workers, impoverished southern landworkers have organised land occupations and other militant action during the last three months in protest at high unemployment, the lack of government aid and the urgent need for land reform.

The government's intention to legalise abortion, despite its extremely limited basis, has provoked a storm of protest from the Catholic right—if only because this has been the sole area of PSOE policy which they can organise around.

In response to this and in opposition to the government's completely inadequate reforms a lively pro-abortion campaign has been organised by women's groups and the far left. Finally as demonstrations in late October showed, opposition to Spain's entry into NATO still remains an issue around which there are considerable possibilities to mobilise. What's more, the Spanish campaign's focus on the Western Alliance has given the movement a far more political and combative nature than other European movements.

Why the bosses like Bob

1983 saw the election of a Labor government in Australia. Mick Armstrong, of our sister organisation, the Australian International Socialists, analyses Labor's first few months in office.

In March last year Bob Hawke's Australian Labor Party (ALP) comfortably defeated Malcolm Fraser's Liberals (Tories).

Hawke's success was quickly repeated in two state parliaments: South Australia and Western Australia. As Labor was already in office in the two largest and most industrialised states, New South Wales and Victoria, this left only Queensland in the north and the island state of Tasmania still in Tory hands.

The only setback for Labor came in Queensland in October. The arch reactionary Bjelke Petersen, famous for his ban on street marches, limited the 'southern socialist advance' to a 2-3 percent swing. Petersen was aided by electoral boundaries rigged to favour conservative rural voters and successfully employed populist rhetoric and appeals to Queensland 'nationalism' to ward off the Australian nationalist appeal of the ALP.

Bob Hawke, and the state ALP governments, came to office with the acquiescence and indeed at times the open support of the ruling class. The bosses had lost confidence in the Fraser government which seemed directionless in the face of the world recession which hit here severely in late 1982. The Liberals were ideologically divided between conservative 'dries' and small 'l' liberals, particularly over wages policy.

Fraser had been unable to restrain wages during the short-lived resources boom of 1980/81 and the bosses had little confidence that the Liberals would be able to control the unions when the economy started to recover.

Incomes policy

The ALP argued for a return to centralised wage fixing under the control of that peculiarly Australian institution the Arbitration Commission. The Arbitration system had broken down during the 1980/1 mini-boom as workers won considerable gains in wages and reduced working hours by strike action and direct negotiations with their bosses outside the Commission.

With the onset of the recession, the union bureaucrats were only too willing to hand back control of their members' pay packets to Arbitration provided they could be guaranteed a small increase.

In the lead up to the elections, the ALP hastily cobbled together a suitably vague Prices and Incomes Accord with the ACTU

(the equivalent of the British TUC) to bind the unions even tighter to Arbitration. Hawke argued that the Accord, which talked about a greater union say in government decisions and improved welfare measures, was a more effective formula for keeping the unions in check than the confrontationist wage freeze imposed by the Liberals in late 1982. The leading employers were not entirely convinced by the argument but having lost faith in the Liberals were prepared to give Hawke a go.

Hawke's personal standing was important in cementing the deal. He is on the hard right of the Labor Party (a champion of the US alliance, a keen proponent of exporting uranium, and an inveterate red baiter). Hawke was only installed as party leader after the elections had been called by Fraser. He surgically removed the moderate, Bill Hayden, who could not match his glamour in the opinion polls.

Cultivating capitalists

Hawke began his political career as an industrial advocate for the ACTU and having proved himself by selling out a number of key strikes, rose to become ACTU president. He thus has close connections with the right-wing machine which controls the top levels of the trade union movement. These connections were important for securing union support for the incomes policy and in assuring the bosses that he had a chance of making it stick.

Hawke, who had established as ACTU president a strong populist following that went well beyond trade union ranks, has over a period of years personally cultivated a number of leading capitalists, like Peter Abeles, head of the transport group TNT, and Rod Carnegie, of the giant mining company CRA.

These links helped establish his credentials with the capitalist class as a whole. This was reflected in the press which immediately swung to a more pro-Labor position once Hawke had ousted Hayden as leader.

In the wake of his electoral victory, Hawke rapidly moved to consolidate the Prices and Incomes Accord. He convened a National Economic Summit of leading bosses, union officials, state premiers and other notables to establish a 'consensus' on economic policy. It was a great propaganda coup.

After a certain amount of arm twisting behind the scenes there was an almost unanimous endorsement of the return to centralised wage fixing. What opposition there was came from those sections of industry which felt they could use the stick of high unemployment to intimidate the working class into even greater wage cuts.

The left wing of the union bureaucracy hardly raised a squeak about Hawke's wage cutting. In fact Communist Party union officials have been among the most forth-

right supporters of the Prices and Incomes Accord. At the recent ACTU Congress CP member Laurie Carmichael, head of the key Metalworkers Union, led a savage assault on the small Food Preservers Union whose members at Heinz had won a significant pay increase outside Arbitration.

The Eurocommunist line CP, which is now reduced to a paper membership of only 2,000, argues that the concessions associated with the Accord represent a major gain for workers. The reality is that these supposed concessions are nothing but sugar coating on the pill of wage controls, designed to make it easier for the bureaucrats to sell it to their rank and file.



Bob Hawke

In office the ALP has done nothing to implement the 'reforms' contained in the Accord. The first Labor budget in August was uniformly praised by the bosses' press for limiting the size of the deficit. The budget will do nothing to lower unemployment. The government has admitted that unemployment will rise by another 100,000. There have not even been modest reforms. The new compulsory health insurance scheme, Medicare, billed as a great Labor initiative, is to be funded by a special levy on wages.

Labor has also gone out of its way to prove how 'responsible' it is on foreign policy. One of Hawke's first acts as PM was to rush off to Washington to plead for a strengthening of the US alliance. Bill Hayden, now installed as foreign minister, defied a strike by maritime and waterfront workers to welcome the nuclear-armed US warship, the *Texas*, to Brisbane. The government has also moved towards endorsing the Indonesian invasion of the island of Timor.

While the ALP left has not raised any serious opposition to Hawke's attacks on living standards, they have made a few token gestures on foreign policy. Softer issues like Timor are the ideal way for the left to try to maintain their radical image which has been frayed by their capitulation on economic policy. It fits in with the nationalist anti-Americanism, that the Labor left passes off as socialist politics.

The left's rhetoric has been most shrill over uranium mining. There is strong rank

and file opposition in the ALP to Hawke's pro-uranium stand. However, because the left has largely confined the fight to within the party, they face almost certain defeat. They did nothing to mobilise workers to ban uranium mining, when there was a chance of doing so a few years ago. Effectively they went along with the ACTU sellout of bans that had been placed.

So far Hawke has been able to use his enormous popularity with the electorate to swamp any opposition. He has whipped up a wave of Australian nationalism by successfully cashing in on the 'consensus' of the Economic Summit and events such as Australia's victory in the America's Cup yacht race. The euphoria over the victory of millionaire yachtsman Alan Bond was used to argue that we are all in the same boat and must pull together to achieve even greater national triumphs. Tell that to the hundreds of shop assistants that Bond threw overboard onto the unemployment scrap heap to keep his profits up.

This extreme nationalism is nothing exceptional for the ALP. The party has traditionally been more nationalist than its European reformist equivalents. The founding principle of the ALP in the 1890s was not the 'socialisation of industry' but the White Australia policy—a policy it continued to champion for the following fifty years. The Labor Party presents itself as being the true defender of the nation, portraying the conservative parties as either selling out Australian interests to foreigners or being the representatives of narrow sectional interests. The ALP was always in the vanguard of attempts to expand Australia's imperialist interests in the Pacific islands.

In the immediate future there is little likelihood of a fightback emerging against Labor. The rapid rise in unemployment in late 1982 (up almost 5 percent in six months) forced most workers onto the defensive. Almost overnight the wages and shorter hours struggles which characterised the 'resources boom' were brought to an end. The number of strike days fell from 4,192,000 in 1981 to 2,156,000 in 1982 and there has been a further drastic decline in 1983.

It was not that there was no fighting spirit on the shop floor, but that the leadership, the organisation and the political understanding necessary for a successful fightback was almost totally lacking. The level and type of struggle (occupations, prolonged and generalised strikes and directly political action) needed to save jobs is alien to the post-war traditions of the Australian working class.

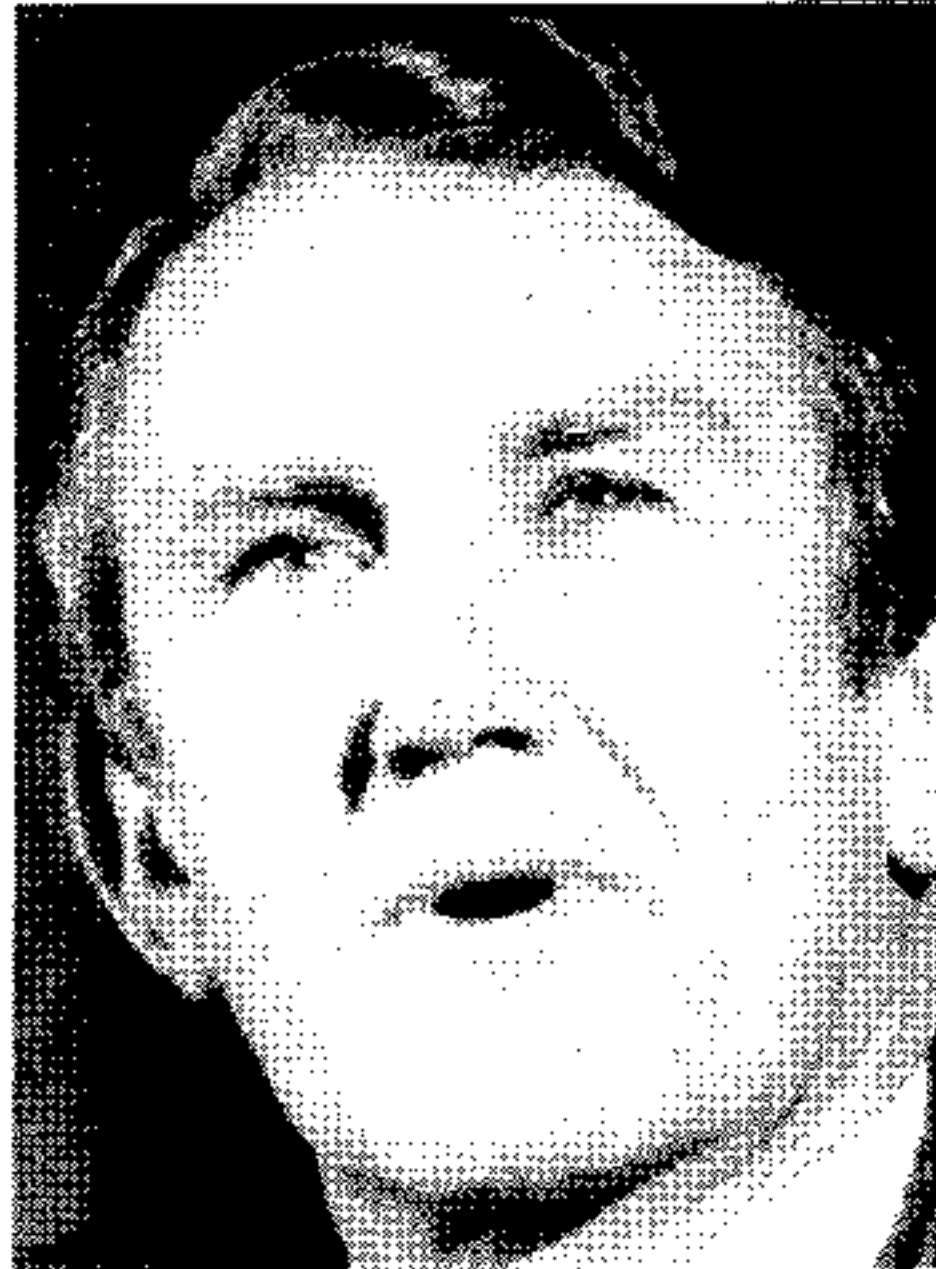
Union tradition

For most of the boom years, workers were able to make significant gains by relying on normal trade union methods. While the level of strikes was high by international standards (Australia was amongst the two or three most strike-prone countries), they were generally short, limited to individual workplaces and usually did not involve picketing. Even amongst the militants the tradition was one of picking off the bosses job by job and a

fairly self-confident and (for the time) healthy wage militancy. No great political understanding was needed to defeat your immediate boss.

While the union movement was thrown into retreat by the recession of the mid-seventies, by the late 70s it had regained the initiative. During the 'resources boom' most of the wages lost between 1976 and 1980 were recovered. Thus the union leadership and narrow trade unionist attitudes were far from discredited amongst the mass of rank and file workers. The unions were seen as having delivered the goods.

This made it much easier for the union bureaucracy to confuse and demoralise even



Malcolm Fraser

those workers who could have been expected to make a stand against the wave of sackings. While there have been a smattering of factory and mine occupations and even the occasional victory (such as at the Sydney engineering plant, Comeng), the general picture is one of a low level of resistance.

Most of the struggles that have broken out have been diverted by the union officials into a fight for more redundancy pay, and inevitably defeated. There were a few militant demonstrations against unemployment in late 1982 and early 1983, including the storming of Parliament by miners and of the posh Melbourne Club by the unemployed. However, action by the unemployed has declined noticeably over the last six months.

It is difficult to know how much the election of the ALP government has contributed to this decline in struggle. While there has undoubtedly been some effect it should not be overstated. The main cause of the downturn is the intimidating effect of high unemployment combined with the ideological victory of the bosses' argument that wage rises cost jobs. There is little evidence that workers have held back because they have any great faith in Hawke delivering major reforms.

Most workers expected little from Hawke, at best they hoped for some relief from the bastardy of Malcolm Fraser. Amongst the militants who had experienced Hawke 'solving' strikes, while he was ACTU head,

there is widespread hatred for him.

The real test will come when unemployment starts to level off (possibly in the middle of 1984) and the balance of power in the workplaces starts to shift back towards the workers. The Labor government and the union bureaucracy will be straining every nerve and sinew to prevent any breach of the Prices and Incomes Accord. If the Accord does break down the ALP has already warned that they will resort to more openly repressive measures and tight monetary policy to force up unemployment.

There are signs that bitterness is building up in a number of workplaces over the ruthlessness of the bosses' drive to break down hard-won working conditions. This bitterness could explode when the economy picks up. The Food Preservers have shown that even in the depths of the recession wage gains can be made by direct action outside Arbitration.

The serious business press has no great faith that the Incomes Policy will hold under the impact of recovery. Significantly, recent ALP governments, despite all their intentions, have had no great success in holding down wages.

Under Whitlam in 1973/4 there was a major wage explosion, which is why the bosses got the Governor General to sack him in 1975. NSW, which has had a state Labor government since 1976, has the highest level of strikes, especially amongst railway workers, teachers, hospital staff and other state government employees.

The left in Australia is in a sorry state. Prior to the sixties there was basically only the Communist Party to the left of the ALP. The industrial upsurge of the late sixties, the campaign against the Vietnam war (which was very large as Australian troops fought alongside the Americans), and the student movement generated a new, more radical left. The fracturing of the CP into three hostile parties, Maoist, pro-Moscow and Eurocommunist, also created more space for the emergence of a revolutionary left.

Moving right

However, with the end of the Vietnam war, left and movement politics increasingly moved to the right. The Maoists turned from the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution to embrace hardline Australian nationalism and then splintered and effectively disappeared. The CPA, after flirting with more left-wing positions, consolidated on a line which differs little from the centre/left of the ALP. The same decline, both politically and numerically, is reflected in the Trotskyist sects.

This is not to say that there are not possibilities for revolutionaries in the coming period. The election of Labor has created a more political climate. The fantasy that Australia's natural resources made it relatively immune from the effects of the world crisis have been brutally dispelled over the past eighteen months. Provided revolutionaries have a realistic perspective and are prepared to stand out against the right-wing tide, they can make small gains from those people who are disillusioned with Labor.

Ditching Brent Labour

The Labour group on Brent council have been in the news lately. Mike Simons looks at the story behind their loss of control of the council.

There were extraordinary scenes during the last two council meetings of 1983 in Brent, North London. They climaxed with the Tory takeover of the council following the defection of black councillor Ambrozone Neil to the Tories.

Both meetings brought out some 500 protesters from the local Labour parties and community groups demanding Neil's resignation and ended with invasions of the council chamber.

Thatcher was quick to denounce the action as the work of the 'fascist left'. Neil Kinnock was only marginally more restrained. He 'understood' the protesters' demands for Neil's resignation but warned disrupting council meetings 'was not in the tradition of the Labour Party'.

Ambrozone Neil's defection has stunned many Labour Party members in Brent, not least its left wingers. They now see the prospect of their pet political projects being scrapped by the Tories. However the Labour Party, particularly the left, have only themselves to blame for the debacle.

The Brent Labour Party was a bastion of the Bennite left. It was in Brent East that Ken Livingstone wanted to stand for parliament. In a famous statement he said he felt at home there among the 'minorities' and the 'dispossessed'. His ambitions were of course thwarted with Labour's NEC forcing the party to readopt its existing MP, Tribune Reg Freeson.

The Bennites had more success at council level, replacing many of the old guard with a combination of left wingers and ethnic minority candidates. The fight for more black candidates in an area with a majority black population was a central demand of the Bennites. Colour rather than politics was clearly the priority, otherwise they would have been wary of Ambrozone Neil.

Frank Hansen, one of Brent's hard left councillors told *Socialist Review* Ambrozone Neil was 'supportive of the left'. 'She was supported by the left,' he said, adding, 'but then so were most black candidates. There was a general feeling there should be more black representation on the council.'

Ambrozone Neil wasn't slow to take advantage of the do-gooders on the Labour left, but her own politics were far from left wing. She began her political life campaigning around education after her son Ambrose was excluded from school, an all too common method of disciplining black students in the borough.

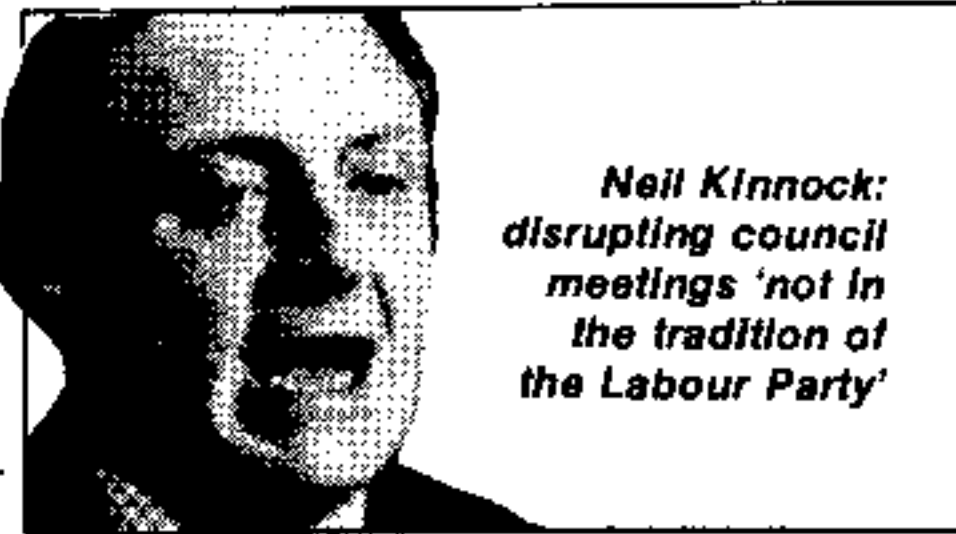
Ironically it was Max Morris, then Com-

munist Party president of the National Union of Teachers, who excluded her son. Morris is now in Hornsey Labour Party where he has led efforts to exclude Tariq Ali from membership.

Neil founded the 'Parents Association for Educational Advance', a black parents' organisation demanding a better deal for their children at school. They called for a return to traditional teaching—'firm discipline and skills like English and Mathematics'.

Normally such talk is anathema to the left, but in Brent they pushed Ambrozone Neil to be Deputy Chairperson of Education.

The Labour councillors admit they only balked when Neil demanded that three schools be turned over to her association where black children only would be taught. Furthermore, they say Neil demanded the right to hire and fire teachers.



Neil Kinnock:
disrupting council meetings 'not in the tradition of the Labour Party'

Councillor Frank Hanson explained, 'She was antagonistic to the local unions. She said they're all racist.' What a pity he didn't consider such views important until recently.

Small wonder that *Tribune* could acidly complain that Neil had regularly attended caucus meetings of left councillors until days before her defection!

Once Ambrozone Neil had gained as much political mileage from the Labour Party as possible, she ditched them in a blaze of well-prepared publicity.

Twenty four hours after her defection to the Tories, the *Daily Mail* gave her a full page interview while Labour councillors claim she has visited Westminster for fireside chats with Tory minister Sir George Younger.

The political tokenism that allowed Ambrozone Neil to grab the headlines was reflected elsewhere in the council. The normal panoply of political appointees found in left Labour councils was made.

A women's committee was set up and spent its first three public meetings discussing the job description of its three well paid fulltime workers.

Council workers demanding nursery facilities were ignored as were calls for council unions to meet during working hours, a move which more than any other would encourage women's participation in union meetings.

Similarly, the council introduced a code of conduct on race relations. Unfortunately the policy was not fought for by the unions but imposed on them. The councillors based their policy on the demands of the black

workers' group, a body dominated by white-collar, management-grade black nationalists. Furthermore, the council appointed black nationalist race relations advisors who made no secret of their contempt for 'white dominated' unions.

The race relations policy provoked an early confrontation with the unions when a senior porter was sacked for making allegedly racist remarks.

NALGO contested the sacking and both black and white porters signed a petition calling for his reinstatement but the dismissal was upheld. NALGO even balloted on strike action which was lost by 700 to 200.

The black workers' group urged a vote against the strike while the incident allowed a field day for the racists on the council. Far from learning that you can't fight racism by dictat, the Labour left blamed the threatened strike on racist and Tory NALGO members.

Things got worse. The council introduced 'access courses' for black workers who wanted to rise to management grades. (As if having a few more black managers is an answer to oppression!) When a lecturer at Kilburn Poly filled in an application form in the name of his dog, he was sacked although he claimed it was a joke. Once again the racists had a field day.

You can gauge the Labour council's priorities by a series of agreements they made with NALGO just before they were turfed from office.

Members of the 'Women in NALGO' group were given three hours a month for meetings in works time, the black workers' group received a similar allowance. In contrast, shop stewards' committees were only allowed two hours for meetings every six weeks and travelling time was specifically excluded!

The council's attempts at job creation were also flawed. Along with the GLC, they persuaded workers not to fight GEC when they announced plans to close their Associated Automation plant but to set up a workers' coop instead. GEC were paid £830,000 for the plant but the coop collapsed within months, with the workers losing an average £1,500 each which they had invested in the business.

The council has been involved in a series of confrontations with its workforce. Unlike other left wing Labour councils they didn't use the Special Patrol Group against the residential workers, but they did nothing to settle the dispute. NALGO members were denounced as Tories by councillors preparing plans for the closure of some homes and the compulsory transfer of staff.

Teachers in the borough have fought closures and transfers while most of the council's token gestures to 'minorities' and the 'community' have passed the manual workers by.

Small wonder then that when the edifice of municipal socialism came crashing down, the council workers, the people with the power to resist the Tories, looked on indifferently. The shop stewards committees dutifully passed resolutions opposing the Tory hijacking of the council, but their members were conspicuously absent from the picket lines.

Left cover for the sell-out

Sweetheart deals with 'left wing' employers is one danger local government employees always face. **Iain Ferguson** shows how in Strathclyde the residential workers have paid the price of their union leaders' readiness to collaborate with the council.

The official NALGO view is:

'By far the most effective action has been in Strathclyde Region, where Branch organisation and control of the dispute has been superb...A major element of the Branch's strategy has been the use of wildcat tactics.

'...Management have been kept on the hop and just don't know where they are going to have to find stand-in arrangements next.' *Public Service (Scottish Supplement), December 1983.*

This extremely rosy view of unbridled militancy coupled with dynamic leadership contrasts strongly with the experience of the Strathclyde residential workers themselves. Time and again in the course of the twelve weeks of the dispute they pressed for immediate escalation of the action only to have their wishes ignored by the branch officials leading the dispute.

Strict adherence to national guidelines, a 'symbolic' occupation of an assessment centre following a management attempt at closure, and a partial stoppage on 7 December sums up the relative inactivity of Strathclyde, the largest NALGO branch in the country.

This is all the more surprising when one realises that, although control of the branch as a whole lies in the hands of a Broad Left grouping of Labour and Communist Party members, union organisation in the Social Work department (to which the residential workers belong) is mainly in the hands of Militant supporters.

As well as having more than a dozen stewards in the Glasgow sub-region alone, they control most of the key union positions within the department at Glasgow and regional level. While it is true that their main strength lies in area teams rather than residential homes, they were nevertheless in a position to exercise considerable influence in the department as a whole, particularly in the person of their leading activist, Ronnie Stevenson, who is also Divisional Convenor.

But they used their influence over the course of the dispute, not to develop the militancy and self-confidence of the residential workers, but rather to foster illusions both in the branch bureaucracy and in the (not so left) Strathclyde Labour Council.

What actually happened? From the

outset, the dispute in Strathclyde has been tightly controlled by a Disputes Operation Committee, a partly unelected body made up of branch officials and residential workers.

The first real test of this committee's leadership came less than three weeks into the dispute when, on the 29 September, the Regional Social Work Director arrived at an Assessment Centre in the west end of the city, Roberton, and informed striking staff there that the centre was now closed — permanently!

This was clearly a provocation on the part of management, since at the self-same time local NALGO officials were actually engaged in discussions with regional councillors after the council's failure, the previous day, to provide temporary relief staff to Roberton. It was a provocation that called for a swift response from the union.

In fact the branch leadership *did* initially respond quickly and called out four children's homes. As news of management's behaviour at Roberton spread, there was outrage among residential workers and by the following morning no less than seventeen homes had contacted the branch office, saying they too wanted to be called out in support of Roberton.

Panic and backtrack

Faced with this response from a group of workers often thought of as backward, the branch leadership behaved in predictable fashion — they panicked, backtracked rapidly, called together a meeting of the striking workers (in the emergency centre where the children from the home were staying!) and instructed them to return to work immediately. Only the Roberton workers were to remain on strike and continue their 'symbolic' occupation.

What was the basis for calling off the action? It appeared in fact that management had agreed to supply temporary relief in future where required. But they had *not* agreed to reopen Roberton. Not surprisingly,

this 'solution' attracted a good deal of anger and confusion among the residential workers, which was not helped by leading branch official Andy Sweeney stating at a mass stewards' meeting the following week that 'the way we save Roberton is by winning this dispute'.

Fortunately, a majority of the meeting recognised this for the sellout it was, and a motion from Roberton calling for further supportive action was overwhelmingly carried. However, in a move which was to set the pattern for the rest of the dispute, the Disputes Committee, meeting afterwards, decided to ignore the decision of the meeting. Its refusal to step up the action was blandly and misleadingly reported in the branch newspaper, *Spinal Column*:

'The branch, despite strong membership pressure to continue action to reopen Roberton immediately, has decided to seek reopening through negotiations at this stage.'


Even at this stage of the dispute, it was becoming very apparent that the branch officials, faced with a choice, preferred to preserve their sweetheart relationship with the councillors (particularly where the closed shop seemed threatened) to carrying out the wishes of the residential workers.

How did the Militant stewards react at this critical juncture? For the first and probably only time in the course of the dispute, they voted against the branch officials. However, criticism of the officials' action was so muted as to be almost apologetic. Ronnie Stevenson actually took the opportunity to direct most of his anger against those 'wild-eyed' contributions which spoke of sellout, and which stressed the need for mass meetings, an accountable Disputes Committee, and all-out action as the way to win.

To newly radicalised residential workers, confused and angered by the officials' behaviour, Stevenson's message was one intended to reassure: the branch officials had made an understandable tactical error in the face of a difficult situation. There was no cause for concern; above all, there had been no sellout.

But the branch officials were not the only people whom the Militant supporters were to help out of a tight spot. By their insistence that the *real* fight lay elsewhere, ie with those Tory employers who were refusing to negotiate, and that consequently there was

'Socialism is a new society of freedom — or it is nothing.'



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no point in stepping up the action in Strathclyde, they allowed the ruling Labour Group a much easier ride than it deserved.

Actually, it was no mean feat, convincing angry residential workers that Strathclyde was not the main enemy, especially when the council was adopting tactics which would have warmed the heart of Eddie Shah. Nevertheless, this was the task that the Militant supporters applied themselves to, in the interests of building the alliance between workers and Labour councillors which Militant has argued for throughout the dispute.

What did the alliance mean in Strathclyde and who gained more from it — the council or the residential workers?

The first point to make is that Strathclyde's Labour councillors are, in the main, old-style Labourites of the Bob Mellish rather than the Peter Tatchell variety. They see their chief task as being to 'manage' Strathclyde (as opposed, for example, to twinning with Grenada like Islington, or organising demonstrations against unemployment, like Liverpool). Not surprisingly, therefore as Roberton showed, they reacted to the dispute in the way that Labour politicians (old *and* new), and good managers tend to react in these circumstances — by 'threatening the closed shop agreement, redundancies, and home closures.' (*Spinal Column*).

Uneasy truce

After the Roberton episode, the branch newspaper reported that an 'uneasy truce' had been established and the alliance got on the road again. For its part, the council agreed to employ sufficient temporary staff to provide cover for the overtime ban, and to recognise the residential workers' claim 'in principle'. The price was that 'in return, Councillor Carson sought assurances of no further escalation of the action'. The 'uneasy truce' did not, of course, commit the council to re-opening Roberton — even 'in principle'.

The next blow to the alliance came on 1 November, when the comrade Scottish employers announced that 'although accepting the claim in principle, they could not settle at present.' In other words, the acceptance 'in principle' had been a sham, the only purpose of which had been to buy time and prevent escalation of the action.

Thereafter the alliance moved to crisis point as the residential workers, pissed off with the delaying tactics of the (local) leadership, began to press for escalation of the dispute in mass meetings on the 4 October, 20 October and 14 November. While approval already came from the National Strike Operations Committee, strong expectations of imminent escalation were reinforced by the Dispute Committee Newsheet of the 12 November:

'If the National Delegate meeting approves escalation, it will begin in Strathclyde very soon afterwards. This escalation will range from an administrative and clerical ban to strike action — on which a conclusive ballot has already taken place (over 85 percent voted YES)...It is unfortunate that we now have



to resort to escalation, but residential workers have come to realise that this is the only way to break the intransigence of the employers, who continue to refuse to negotiate on our claim. By escalating, we will be joining other residential workers up and down the country who are weakening the employers' resistance by their decisive action.'

In fact, no escalation ever took place — despite another mass meeting voting in favour. What *did* happen was almost a re-run of the Roberton episode.

Faced with the prospect of selective action, Strathclyde Labour Council acted quickly: prominent councillors made statements to the press about doing away with the closed shop; every residential worker received a letter from the Regional Director giving a guarantee of protection against reprisals should they choose to disobey union instructions; and a management meeting was convened on the 18 November to organise management cover (ie scabbing) for strike-bound homes, again with similar guarantees being given.

Once again the branch leadership response was to do precisely nothing. On the pretext of awaiting the outcome of the national ballot on nine to five working, all selective strike action was called off. Once again, the branch officials — communists as well as Labour Party members — showed they were not prepared to jeopardise their sweetheart arrangement with the employers. And once again, their left cover was to be provided by...the Militant.

At the branch AGM on the 21 November, when the frustration of the residential workers began to spill over into heckling branch officials, it was Ronnie Stevenson (now, incidentally, fulltime industrial correspondent with the Militant) who came forward in the role of defender of the branch officials, the Disputes Committee and, in fact, the whole conduct of the dispute in Strathclyde.

Not only did he argue in favour of ignoring the decision of that morning's mass meeting to escalate the action immediately, he also opposed a resolution calling for regular mass meetings with elected and accountable strike committees for any section going out on strike.

This consistent contempt by Militant

supporters for the decisions of mass meetings, and opposition to elementary matters of union democracy, made the branch officials' job — they would probably ignore these decisions anyway — that much easier.

It could all have been very different. Had the branch leadership chosen to build on the anger and militancy around the Roberton closure, or the strike action ballot, the Roberton might have been saved and Strathclyde forced to give more than a sham 'commitment in principle'. Strikers would also have been in a far stronger position to argue with the members in the 'backward Tory shires' and with other local authority workers about the need for sympathy strike action.

With this approach, all-out national strike action (which, as SWP members argued throughout, was the only way to win the claim) might have been a real possibility.

Instead, the enthusiasm and new-found militancy of the Strathclyde residential workers has been squandered. One of the militant homes (Ailse) decided *not* to come out on the 7 December as a protest at the repeated refusal of the Disputes Committee to honour the decisions of mass meetings — a wrong decision, but an indication of their frustration.

Optional extra

The future for the Roberton workers looks bleak. On past form, the centre will remain closed, the workers will be redeployed and the branch officials will claim this as a victory.

Strathclyde residential workers have learned the hard way that relying on union officials and trusting your own employers — whatever their political complexion — is the way to defeat. As we have seen, the irony is that they were encouraged to do so by people who call themselves 'marxists'.

Both locally and nationally, Militant argued that the way forward for residential workers lay through national action — but only selective action, directed primarily at those 'backward Tory shires' not prepared to negotiate. In this scenario, the good guys are Labour-controlled authorities willing to negotiate (even though not one of them — including Militant-influenced Liverpool — has agreed to meet the claim in full), and the bad guys are the Tory shires and the NALGO NEC, who have failed to give a national lead.

However, where Militant supporters have intervened to direct the anger of residential workers against the Tories and the national union bureaucrats, what they have usually succeeded in doing is let the *local* bureaucrats and *Labour* councillors off the hook — at the expense of an increasingly demoralised membership.

The behaviour of the Militant in Strathclyde throughout the residential workers' dispute is a useful illustration of the way in which that organisation, despite its 'marxist' pretensions, sees workers' self-activity as an optional extra — or even something to be positively discouraged if it impedes the task of building a cosy relationship with Labour councillors and/or 'left' branch bureaucrats.

There are American workers

Glenn Perusek, of our American sister organisation, the International Socialist Organisation, shows this view of a monolithic America to be wrong and misleading.

Ronald Reagan and the American ruling class are worried about Reagan's declining popularity in Europe. The lack of support from European governments for Reagan's recent military adventures in Grenada was a point of discussion in the American press. It was even used as a rationalisation for his military build-up and cold war postures.

The anti-Reagan sentiment often develops into a crude anti-Americanism. The problem with this is that the equation of Reagan with America obscures three things.

Regardless of their stated objections to Reagan's foreign policy, the European ruling classes remain securely within Reagan's camp. Whatever minor disagreements they may have with Reagan's methods, Europe's rulers are agreed on all fundamental issues with Reagan.

The anti-Reagan attitude in Europe easily feeds into a blatant chauvinism, even on the part of the British left. F P Thompson actually argues that, at bottom, it is a 'lack of culture' which leads Americans to produce nuclear weapons.

This leads to the third and most important problem with crude anti-Americanism. It is not 'America' which deploys massive nuclear weapons in Europe, it is the American ruling class. The US ruling class has fundamental interests which coincide with the interests of the European rulers. Inside the US, the capitalists' interests are opposed to those of American workers.

What is the state of the American working class?

According to Edwin Meese, Reagan's right hand man, workers and the poor are not so badly off. Meese recently asserted that there is no hunger problem in the US. People go to soup kitchens 'because the food is free and that's easier than paying for it. I think', he continued, 'we have a system in this country (where) virtually everyone is taken care of by one program or another.'

The reality, of course, is much different from Meese's and the crude anti-American conception in Europe. America is a class society, where a handful of enormously wealthy capitalists live amidst a sea of poor and working people. The official estimate puts at 35 million the number of people in the US—out of a total population of about 230 million—who live below the official poverty line. In addition, there are many millions more who are just above that line. Even Meese was forced to admit that he did not really know how many poor people were starving in America. The government has



now set up another commission to try to find out.

A very important part of this poorest section of American society is black. Blacks comprise twelve percent of the population and are today mostly concentrated in racially segregated ghettos in the major industrial cities. They face conditions of unparalleled racism. The unemployment rate for blacks is consistently about double that for whites. Today, roughly half of all black youth are unemployed. For blacks as a whole the figure is 17 percent. The average wage for black workers is less than 60 percent that for whites. And fully 32 percent of black families live below the official poverty line. In addition, police brutality—from routine harassment to cold blooded killings—is a day-to-day reality in the black community.

In contrast, at the top of American society is untold wealth, concentrated in a very few hands. The majority of all corporate assets are held by a mere 162 firms. The controlling share of the stock in these corporations is

held by a tiny group of investment bankers and corporate giants who skim handsome salaries from their profits.

The Reagan presidency has been a period when capitalists have been on an escalated offensive against the US working class and the poor. Some \$25 billion have been cut from social spending—welfare, unemployment benefits and food stamps have all been slashed. And this has been during the worst recession in the US since the depression of the 1930s.

The attack on the working class did not start under Reagan. The wave of concessions—contracts which give away wages and benefits which had been won earlier—started in earnest in 1979, with the Chrysler contract, which effectively dropped Chrysler workers' wages to about \$2.50 below those of other autoworkers. Predictably the Chrysler contract led the other major automakers to insist their workers agree to concession contracts as well.

But the attack on the working class was stepped up in 1981 by Reagan himself, when he summarily fired 11,700 air traffic controllers in the PATCO strike. As scenes of the union's leaders being taken off to jail in manacles appeared in the TV news, Reagan hypocritically wooed Poland's Solidarnosc! The right to strike, Reagan was saying, should exist everywhere except in the 'land of the free'.

'Foolhardy' solidarity

The state of the organised labour movement is illustrated by its response to the PATCO strike. While there were words of support from the leaders of the major unions, no one came to PATCO's aid. The president of the International Association of Machinists (IAM), William Winpisinger (a rarity in organised American labour because he calls himself a socialist), said that talk of any solidarity action supporting PATCO was 'airy', 'bubbleheaded,' and 'foolhardy'. Although he said he personally would not cross the PATCO picket lines, he gave nothing but excuses for why he would do nothing to bring the machinists out.

Similarly, Lane Kirkland, the head of the AFL-CIO, the US equivalent of the TUC, whined that any industrial action supporting the strike would cause hardship to the public. The late Jerry Wurf, a social democrat who headed AFSCME, the main public employees' union, offered that PATCO was not really part of the labour movement—they had, in fact, supported Reagan's presidential campaign—as his reason for not supporting the strike.

Thus, in September 1981, some 500,000 workers could march in Washington on 'Solidarity Day'—an anti-Reagan demonstration and the largest labour rally in US history—while PATCO was literally being smashed by Reagan. The gap between the potential of that march and any real union solidarity in action was large.

In the wake of the PATCO defeat and the onset of the deep 1981-82 recession, all of organised labour was on the defensive. Unemployment climbed to 10.8 percent, the highest post-war level. Contract settlements

in 1982 increased wages only 3.5 percent overall, compared to 6.4 percent in the previous bargaining round. This was the lowest increase since the government started collecting such statistics. The number of strikes declined to the lowest level since 1942. Among Reagan's budget cuts was the department in the Bureau of Labour Statistics which collects strike statistics. They now keep records on only those strikes involving more than 1,000 workers. About 92 percent of all strikes involve fewer than 1,000 workers.

Fully one-third of all the contract settlements in 1982 were concession contracts—wage cuts agreed to by the unions. Workers in many major industries—including auto, steel, trucking and meatpacking—all suffered 'takebacks'. Given the high level of unemployment and the lack of an alternative to the union leadership, it seemed that there was little for the organised working class to do but keep their heads down and accept the wage cuts.

Greyhound strike

While the level of union solidarity has been low, capitalists have been experiencing no such difficulties. In December 1982, Roger Smith, chairman of General Motors, said in a statement to the United Steelworkers (USW), who do not work for him, that he would start buying steel from Japan beginning in March 1983, if they did not settle with the steel companies. The steel companies were demanding a \$1.50/hour wage cut, plus other concessions. The unions voted to accept the concessions.

In order to wring further concessions from the USW, US Steel, the largest American steelmaker, sent threatening letters this month to workers of five plants. The letters said simply that if the workers did not agree to drastic wage cuts, the plants would be closed—4,700 workers are affected.

The tactic of Continental Airlines carried a different twist, and is getting rave reviews from the bosses. The company declared itself bankrupt at the end of September, 1983, abrogating its union contracts. Then it invited the unionists to come back to work—50 percent longer hours for *half* the pay. The unions (IAM, ALPA, the pilots' union, and AFA, the Flight attendants' union) remain on strike—they have taken Continental to court to have their contracts recognised. Meanwhile 4,000 of the 12,000 Continental workers have gone back to work. Picketing is sparse and the pickets despondent.

All of the potential, and all of the problems, of the US labour movement are captured by the recent Greyhound strike. This was the most important strike in the US since the PATCO defeat. In November 1983, the 12,000 members of the Amalgamated Transit Workers Union (ATU) struck at Greyhound, the largest bus company in the US. The company had tried to extract massive wage cuts—totalling over 30 percent of their wages. They argued that the deregulation of the transportation industry had resulted in conditions of greatly increased competition. In order to compete with the other bus companies and the airlines



—which now have several new non-union companies paying significantly lower wages—Greyhound would have to slash wages.

Greyhound forced the strike by saying that they would not even let the ATU workers continue to work while negotiations went on. In essence they said there was 'nothing to negotiate'. They publicised the fact that 50,000 people had applied for the strikers' jobs, and they were going to replace the entire workforce if they did not accept the cuts.

The response of the membership was impressive for its militancy. In several cities, ATU members and supporters shut down the scab operation of busses. Mass rallies were held in Philadelphia, Boston, Atlanta and Seattle. As one striker put it, 'The rights of all workers are at stake. There is no doubt about it, they are trying to break the union—just like PATCO. If they get away with this, there is no telling where the concessions will stop. The labour movement has to take a stand right here. Otherwise we're finished.'

On 27 November 1983, the ATU members voted overwhelmingly, by 96 percent, to reject a concession contract.

But at the same time, the shallowness of organisation and the lack of leadership were all too apparent. The mass rallies of a few cities were not matched elsewhere. In most cities busses were not stopped at all. And even those cities which did have rallies had them only on one day. Thus, a week after the

massive rejection of a concession contract, the union leadership voted to accept a quite similar contract that cut wages by 13 percent.

As in the PATCO strike, the support from other unions was negligible. This time the bureaucrats could hardly argue that the strikers were 'not real trade unionists' as they had in the PATCO strike. But still, apart from an AFL-CIO sanctioned boycott, there was no real help from the union officials. Some of the militants at Greyhound blamed other ATU members who did not come to picket lines. Demoralisation was evident. Greyhound workers voted in favour of the concession contract.

Changing attitudes

The record of defeats is a long one. Coupled with it is the fact that overall unionisation in the US is now at an abysmal level below 18 percent. This should warm the hearts of the crude anti-Americanists, who often argue that the American working class is somehow 'different' from the European. This argument is usually advanced by social democrats who point to the fact that there is no Social Democratic or Labour Party in the US. And they conclude, wrongly, that the American working class is not as combative as the European. In the US this kind of 'American exceptionalism' leads directly into pessimism—and is a major justification for not building a revolutionary socialist organisation, but instead drifting into the Democratic Party, as much of the left has done.

But even with the low level of unionisation and the dismal series of defeats in the present period, the American working class has a strong tradition of struggle, comparable to any in Europe. Since the 1960s, the overall number of strikes in the US has been about double that for Britain. Given that the US population is about four times as big as Britain, that means that, overall, there are about half as many strikes in the US as in Britain. This is for the whole US—including the anti-union South and Southwest. In the industrial East and Midwest, the level of strike activity compares favourably with almost anywhere in Europe.

The US working class today is hardly 'class conscious' in the marxist sense. Yet, the basic attitude of workers towards the system *has* changed in the past decade.

The material base for the acceptance of the system, the living standard of the 1950s and 1960s is no longer secure. Workers in the US can no longer be characterised as unquestioningly conservative, opposed to militant action and unanimously supportive of American military adventures abroad.

The expiration of the long economic boom, which inflated US working class wages and expectations, ended all this. Today, the idea of challenging the system is not as foreign as it once was. There is an ever-expanding layer of workers in the US who reject Reagan, reject the concessions, reject the arms build up.

The potential for building a socialist current in the US rests squarely with this rejection of the system by the working class. This sentiment cannot but continue to grow in the foreseeable future.



In defence of Leninism

The Marxist left in the West has entered a 'post-Leninist' phase. As recently as the late 1960s and early 1970s, rapidly growing revolutionary organisations in most European countries sought to build Leninist parties. Today, however, Lenin has been consigned to the rubbish heap, the attempt to build modern versions of the Bolshevik Party is derided by fashionable socialist playwrights. The argument of *Beyond the Fragments* has carried the day with much of the left, and not only in Britain. For socialists to model themselves on Lenin and the Bolsheviks, so it is said, is to strangle the liberating, self-emancipatory core of socialism. For strategy socialists turn, not to Lenin, but to a highly selective version of Gramsci.

But the Lenin that is a totem in the East and dismissed in the West bears as much relation to the historical Lenin as the waxwork dummy displayed in Lenin's tomb in Moscow does to his living body. Quite central to the real Lenin's career is Marx's anchor-concept, the self-emancipation of the working class.

This is evident to anyone who studies the series of great texts in which Lenin analysed class forces in pre-revolutionary Russian society. It is evident from such writings as

Lenin died sixty years ago on 21 January. His ideas are not popular on the modern left. Alex Callinicos argues that they retain a vital core which every socialist should study.

The Development of Capitalism in Russia and The Agrarian Question and the 'Critics' of Marx that, far from being the grubby pragmatist depicted by bourgeois scholarship, Lenin had a far more profound understanding of Marx's *Capital* than any of his contemporaries, with the exception of Luxemburg and Bukharin. This theoretical knowledge was not an end in itself; Lenin applied it, as Marx had been trying to at the time of his death, to identify the forces capable of overthrowing the Tsarist regime.

This political focus distinguished Lenin, even in his 20s before the turn of the century, from the founder of Russian Marxism, Plekhanov. The latter studied Russia from the standpoint of the productive forces, in order to show to his Populist opponents that it was too backward a country to achieve socialism until a bourgeois revolution had

opened the doors to socialism.

Formally Lenin agreed that Russia was only ripe for a bourgeois revolution. But his analysis of class-relations showed that the Russian bourgeoisie was too supine and dependent on the Tsarist state and foreign capital to lead this revolution.

He also grasped that the small-holding peasants who made up the mass of the population would be a driving force in the overthrow of the Tsar. However, the leadership of the working class was essential to the success of any peasant revolt. The bourgeois revolution could succeed in Russia only under proletarian hegemony.

At the centre of Lenin's prognosis for the Russian revolution lay the working class. Although only a small minority of the predominantly peasant population, the proletariat was the only class with both the interests and the cohesion to assume the task of revolutionary leadership spurned by the bourgeoisie.

Lenin's efforts were therefore devoted to establishing the political and organisational independence of the working class. Constantly he denounced the Mensheviks' proposed alliance with bourgeois liberalism, a strategy which would tie the proletariat to the apron strings of a counter-revolutionary

capitalist class.

The same preoccupation with the working class as the agency of revolutionary change runs through all Lenin's words and deeds in 1917. Already before his return to Russia in April Lenin had grasped that Trotsky's criticisms of Bolshevik strategy had been correct. Either the Bolsheviks remained loyal to the doctrine inherited from Plekhanov that a Russian revolution could not break the bounds of capitalism, and like the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries, subordinated workers' organisations and interests to the bourgeois Provisional Government, or they mobilised the proletariat and peasantry against that government.

To the initial consternation of the rest of the Bolshevik leadership, Lenin took the second course. Quoting Goethe he told them: 'Theory, my friend, is grey, but green is the tree of life.' The dynamic of working class struggle in the factories of Petrograd, driving beyond the limits of capitalism, was more important than Plekhanov's 'orthodoxy'.

The nature of the state

In the late summer and early autumn of 1917, in hiding in Finland, Lenin sketched out what the workers' republic towards which he was striving would be like. *The State and Revolution* is unfinished, breaking off at the beginning of the chapter on 'The Experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917' (Lenin added in a postscript: 'It is more pleasant and more useful to go through the "experience of the revolution" than to write about it'). Nevertheless, it remains the clearest single statement of the Marxist theory of the state.

All states, says Lenin, following Marx and Engels, are coercive institutions, 'special bodies of armed men', through which a class monopolises the means of violence. Workers' power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, would be distinguished from other forms of state simply by the fact that the ruling class would, for the first time, be the hitherto exploited majority of the population. Emerging from their self-activity subordinated to their direct control, it would be an instrument for destroying every form of exploitation and oppression.

The soviets, councils of workplace delegates first produced spontaneously by the workers of St Petersburg in October 1905, Lenin rapidly grasped, were the perfect form through which the mass of workers could themselves directly exercise power. But even this highly democratic state would be a preliminary to the abolition of any specialised apparatus of coercion with the disappearance of classes in the higher stage of communism. In October 1917 Lenin realised Marx's dreams and led the soviets to power.

The Russian working class, triumphant in October 1917, dominated the rest of Lenin's life by their absence. Civil war, blockade and famine caused the virtual disintegration of the proletariat. The best died on the battlefield or were sucked into party or state apparatus. Many simply fled the starving cities for their home villages. But Lenin's

Bolshevik Party without the working class was like Hamlet without the Prince. The agent of revolutionary change had vanished. The Bolsheviks were left holding power in its name.

Lenin was the first Bolshevik leader to grasp the significance of this fact. Already in the winter of 1920-21 he was warning that theirs was a workers' state with 'bureaucratic deformations'. He insisted that trade unions independent of the state were essential both to train workers to hold power and to protect them against 'their' state.

And in the months of early 1923 before his final stroke incapacitated him, Lenin fought from his sickbed the bureaucratic monstrosity headed by Joseph Stalin which had grown up in the vacuum left by the soviets.

This lonely battle, recorded in Moshe Lewin's *Lenin's Last Struggle*, was a tragic one. For what could Lenin do in the absence of the working class on whom he had always oriented and to whom he had always appealed in inner-party battles? Revolution abroad could alone resolve the dilemma. It was the Bolsheviks' isolation which had caused disintegration of the Russian proletariat in the first place.

Only the aid of soviet republics in the great industrial centres of the West would have removed the material basis of the Stalinist bureaucracy. But that same bureaucracy, after Lenin's death, used the cover of the new doctrine of 'socialism in one country' (anathema to Lenin, who insisted that 'without the revolution in Germany, we shall perish') to transform the world Communist movement inspired by October 1917 into the counter-revolutionary instrument of the Russian state. Defeat followed defeat; China, Britain, Germany, France, Spain.

Trotsky, who tried to keep authentic Bolshevism alive, was exiled, and hounded and finally murdered. Lenin's thought, vulgarised and distorted by Stalin, became the official ideology of a state which denied its revolutionary essence, just as Lenin's corpse, against the protest of his widow Krupskaya, was mummified and placed on display, a sacred relic to sanctify the rule of the heirs of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great in the Kremlin.

There are many socialists who may not deny the truth of much of the above, but who will still dismiss it as a tale of far away and long ago, sad and interesting perhaps, but of no relevance to our current tasks and preoccupations. Such an attitude is mistaken, on at least two counts.

Every socialist lives in the shadow of Stalinism. Every new outrage in the 'socialist countries', every Afghanistan and Kampuchea, is yet another reinforcement of the bourgeois case against socialism. Unless we can show both that Stalinism is the negation of the socialism of Marx and Lenin, and how state capitalism triumphed on the ruins of the October revolution then what can we say in reply to the capitalist apologists who say that any attempt to transform society will lead inevitably to the Gulag Archipelago?

Even more important, the revolutionary core of Lenin's thought is of fundamental importance to socialists in the West today.

What is this core? To begin with, Marxism is, in the final analysis, a theory of revolutionary politics. 'Politics is concentrated economics', Lenin wrote. All the contradictions and antagonisms of capitalist society are fused and condensed in the apparatus of state power. The transformation of the capitalist mode of production presupposes the destruction of this apparatus. There can be no peaceful, gradual transition to a classless society. Socialism requires the political struggle against the capitalist state.

Lenin's insistence on the decisive importance of the apparatus of state power isn't just an interesting historical thesis. It has been fully confirmed by the most important recent struggles—Portugal 1974-5, Iran 1978-9, Poland 1980-1.

The disintegration of the repressive state apparatus itself lay at the heart of the Portuguese crisis. The ruling class regained the initiative in November 1975 when elite paratroop units defeated the left wing regiments even though the latter outnumbered and outgunned them.

The moral and political collapse of the corrupt elite around the Shah, and the desertion of many army units to the side of the revolution doomed the Iranian regime in February 1979.

In Poland, the Communist Party fell apart, but the military and security apparatus served as an iron frame, holding the state together and providing the ruling class with centralised leadership. In December 1981 that apparatus was able to destroy Solidarity.

The primacy of politics has crucial implications for socialist practice. It lies behind, for example, Lenin's famous description of the revolutionary as 'the tribune of the people'. This wasn't a vague populism, dissolving different classes into the 'people'. Lenin was attacking those Russian socialists (whom he dubbed the 'Economists') who argued that workers should concern themselves with specific trade union, economic issues, leaving politics to the bourgeois liberals.

Politics and economics

Economism wasn't, of course, a purely Russian disease. Indeed, it is a central feature of reformist theory and practice that there should be a division of labour between politics, which consists essentially of social-democratic parties contesting elections, and economics, which is the preserve of the trade union bureaucracy. The Stuttgart Congress of the Second International resolved in 1907 that 'while it falls to the parties of Social Democracy to organise and lead the political struggles of the proletariat, so it is the task of union organisation to co-ordinate and lead the economic struggles of the working class.'

Lenin firmly rejected any such division of labour. In Russian conditions, where bourgeois-democratic representative institutions did not exist, 'whoever disparages the tasks of the political struggle transforms the Social-Democrat (ie the revolutionary socialist) from a tribune of the people into a trade union secretary.' Because 'politics is concentrated economics', not parliament-



1917: Bolsheviks distributing newspapers on the first day of the session of soviets in Moscow

arism, workers' economic struggles are important, not in themselves, but as a means of developing the consciousness and organisation necessary to destroy the capitalist state.

Lenin's focus on the state is important for another reason. The workers' movement was not defeated in Portugal in 1975 and in Poland in 1981 because of its lack of strength. What was decisive in both cases was the centralised leadership and clarity about objectives which the ruling class possessed and which their opponents lacked. Reduced to its minimum, capitalist power rests ultimately in the general staff of the armed forces and the elite troops they control. (It was more than symbolic that it should have been General Groener, chief of the Imperial General Staff, who presided, in alliance with the leaders of German Social Democracy, over the bloody suppression of the Berlin revolutionary left by the *Freikorps* in January 1919). To take power the working class needs its own general staff, its own centralised organisation and leadership.

The difficulty is that workers' struggles do not spontaneously generate the necessary organisation and leadership. Rosa Luxemburg thought otherwise. Her pamphlet *The Mass Strike* marvellously

chronicles the way in which, during periods of revolutionary crisis, economic and political struggles feed into each other, strengthening and broadening the workers' movement.

She seems to have believed that these struggles would act as a process of political clarification. Revolutionary leadership would be necessary, but would take the form of generalised propaganda about the tasks of the movement. Marxists, she implied, should raise their banner, and wait until the mass movement inevitably gravitated towards them.

Revolutionary consciousness

Lenin's most important contribution to Marxism was his refusal to accept that 'the working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism'. His famous assertion in *What is to be Done?* that workers will not of themselves develop beyond 'trade union consciousness' and that revolutionary consciousness can only come 'from outside' through the instrumentality of a centralised party is often attacked as the acme of elitism. What is less often recognised is that all the experience of the eighty two years since Lenin wrote this pamphlet have confirmed

the essential truth of his remarks.

Considerable sophistication has been shown in attempts by the better bourgeois sociologists to characterise the consciousness of the Western working class. Anthony Giddens, for example, distinguishes between two forms of class consciousness, conflict consciousness and revolutionary consciousness. The former is regularly displayed in the trade union struggle. Workers have a strong sense of the conflict of interest between themselves and their employer, and are ready to use the methods of economic class struggle to advance their own interests. However, this attitude does not involve a confident vision of an alternative society which is the goal of their class actions; only when this vision is present do we have revolutionary consciousness.

Workers under Western capitalism have a 'dual consciousness', argues Michael Mann. Keenly aware of the daily class struggle in the workplace, they do not see any way out of their situation. The result is a 'pragmatic acceptance' of the status quo. Working class life is increasingly 'privatised'; its meaning lies outside work in the family, and the aim of work is to provide as decent a standard of living as possible for that family.

Capitalism survives less through constant coercion than through the grudging consent it extracts from the working class. Perhaps the best account of the relation between force and consent was given by the bourgeois sociologist Talcott Parsons. He compared it to the relation between paper money and gold. In everyday transactions, everyone is prepared to accept paper (and its credit equivalents).

But when there is a crisis and confidence collapses, there is a flight into gold, the ultimate form of money. Thus, under capitalism, it is workers' 'pragmatic acceptance' of existing society that holds things together. Only when that constant is withdrawn does the use of force on a large scale become necessary.

Various mechanisms serve to elicit popular consent. Among the most important are capitalist control of the mass media and the education system; the crude economic pressures to keep your head down and make a living; the improvements in workers' conditions of life which capitalism may be able to concede; the fragmentation of work, which divides workers into different industries, firms, trades, skills; the creation and manipulation of racism and sexism; and last, but not least, the incorporation of the working class movement itself within the structures of capitalist power by means of the trade union bureaucracy and the reformist parties.

Lenin, a revolutionary operating in conditions where bourgeois democracy did not exist, did not develop anything like an adequate analysis of these mechanisms. Rosa Luxemburg had a far better insight into the bureaucratisation of the Western labour movement, and it was the sociologist Robert Michels who provided the definitive analysis of the transformation of German Social Democracy into what Lenin would later call a 'bourgeois workers' party' dominated by a conservative labour bureaucracy.

Lenin himself was staggered when the collapse of the Second International in August 1914 finally brought home the degeneration of European Marxism. His own explanation of this collapse, the theory of a 'labour aristocracy' living off the super-profits of imperialism, is flawed. Nevertheless, he grasped the basic point that the conditions of everyday life under capitalism systematically prevent workers from developing a revolutionary understanding of society.

Of course, capitalism is shot through with the profoundest contradictions which drive it constantly into crisis. These contradictions are the soil out of which workers' mass struggles grow. The system of capitalist power is not a seamless whole; its failures stimulate explosions of proletarian militancy. Poland 1980-1 was merely the latest episode in a history of struggle that began not far away, in St Petersburg in 1905. It is the tendency of the capitalist system to throw up such struggles which provides the objective basis of revolutionary socialist politics.

But even mass strikes on the scale of Russia 1905, France 1968, or Poland 1980 do not automatically solve the problems which workers must deal with in order to seize power. They do not create the centralised organisation which is essential for the overthrow of the capitalist state. Workers aren't born again when they take part in mass struggle. They bring to it all the traditions, illusions, hopes and fears which they have acquired during their daily life under capitalism.

Leadership and ideas

The inheritance of the past is a tremendous obstacle to the success of any revolutionary struggle. Its existence has meant that, again and again, it is, paradoxically, the reformists who first benefit from a revolutionary situation. Workers, especially the 'backward', 'unorganised' masses who often take the initiative in such situations when the 'vanguard' holds back, are likely to place their confidence first in established leaders whose cautious and conservative ideas offer

a sense of security to those who have made enormous, previously unimaginable bounds in a brief space of time. It was the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries who dominated the Russian soviets in February 1917, the Social Democrats and Independents who controlled the German workers' and soldiers' councils in November 1918.

Workers' past beliefs aren't a prison which prevents them from taking power. One of the fundamental axioms of Marxism is that consciousness is changed through the experience of struggle itself. The ups and down of struggle, the flow of demands backwards and forwards between the economic and the political act as a great forcing house, pushing workers to seek revolutionary solutions to their problems. Thus far Luxemburg was right. But such solutions require the armed conquest of power by the working class. When it comes the matter of insurrection, as Engels pointed out after the 1848 revolutions, timing, audacity, seizing and keeping the initiative are of the essential.

Unless the revolutionary forces do take the initiative, then workers are likely to relapse into apathy and despair. Poland 1981 is a classic illustration of this truth. As Chris Harman shows in *Class Struggle in Eastern Europe*, the Solidarity leaders dithered and drifted, allowing the regime, in the shape of the armed forces, to take the offensive.

Only a revolutionary party can provide the centralised organisation and leadership without which every mass struggle will end in a defeat like that of December 1981 in Poland. It is important to understand what this means. Lenin did not advocate a Blanquist conspiratorial organisation whose aim was the seizure of power on behalf of the masses by a revolutionary elite.

In some respects *What is to be Done?* is misleading, since the extreme centralisation it advocates reflected, to some degree, the conditions of illegality under which revolutionaries had to work in the period before 1905. When the revolution came in that year Lenin dumped some of the organisational recipes he had advocated three years before. 'Open the gates of the party' to the young workers radicalised by the struggle, he now urged.

Bourgeois scholars insist on seeing Lenin as simply the heir of the Russian revolutionary tradition, with its emphasis on conspiratorial terror. Although Lenin had more sympathy with this tradition, and its recognition of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, than did passive 'orthodox' Marxists like Plekhanov and Martov, he always insisted that only the working class could make the revolution. Reflecting on *What is to be Done?* in 1907, he wrote:

'The working class ... for objective economic reasons possesses a greater capacity for organisation than any other class of capitalist society. Without this condition an organisation of professional revolutionaries would be nothing more than a play thing, an adventure, a mere signboard.'

Lenin's model of the relationship between party and class was that of a constant interaction. The revolutionary party is that section of the proletariat which possesses a Marxist understanding of society and is committed to working for the overthrow of capitalism. Its task is to act as a stimulus to workers' struggles and to give them a coherence and direction which they would otherwise lack, to aim them at the apparatus of capitalist state power. However, only the workers themselves could take power. Lenin was ruthless and unremitting in his scornful criticism of the German Communists who tried to mount a minority putsch in March 1921.

Party and struggle

His view of revolution was well summed up by Gramsci as 'the result of a dialectical process, in which the spontaneous movement of the revolutionary masses and the organizing and directing will of the centre converge'. The soviets, the creation of workers themselves, provided the political basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The task of revolutionaries was to win a majority in the soviets for them to take power. 'Patiently explain' was the Bolshevik watchword between April and September 1917 — a strategy of unremitting propaganda and agitation whose aim was to draw the majority of workers, initially loyal to the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, onto the road to power.

It followed that a revolutionary party cannot passively observe events, waiting for them to go its way. Lenin is sometimes attacked as a 'mechanical materialist'. Yet, already in 1905 he attacked Plekhanov and the Mensheviks for 'ignoring the active, leading and guiding part which can and must be played in history by parties which have realised the material prerequisites of a revolution and have placed themselves at the head of the progressive classes'.

If workers' consciousness is likely to be transformed through their experience of struggle, then the revolutionary party has to be involved in every one of the daily battles waged by labour against capital, however small it is, however limited its goals. In *Left-Wing Communism—an Infantile Disorder* Lenin fiercely assaulted those revolutionaries who were too 'principled' to take part in workers' everyday struggles

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Lenin at his desk reading Pravda

around partial demands. The test of a party is not only its firmness of principle, but 'its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and — if you wish — merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people'.

The organisational formula of democratic centralism flows from this conception of the party. Democracy is essential because of revolutionaries' orientation on workers' struggles. It provides the feed-back mechanism through which the experience of struggle can be assessed and clarified.

It also provides a framework within which different appreciations of the objective situation can be discussed. Without democracy a revolutionary organisation will ossify and die, because otherwise the organisation has no means of determining whether its previous assessments, and the practical conclusions drawn from them have proved to be correct or not.

Centralise

The Bolshevik Party was certainly no monolith. The minutes of its Central Committee during the crucial period of 1917-18, published by Pluto Press in its Marxist days, record the wideranging and sometimes bitter disagreements between the leaders of the October revolution. The rituals of unanimity practised by the Stalinist parties are Leninist only in name. They are a feature of the bureaucratic centralism which is one means through which the ruling classes of the state-capitalist world exercise power.

Democracy, however, is balanced by centralism in Lenin's conception of the party. This is for three reasons. First, the

working class under capitalism is highly fragmented, its consciousness uneven and imbued with bourgeois ideology. Decentralised delegate democracy of the sort that is an essential feature of the soviets would simply reflect the fragmentation of the class into the party.

Revolutionary organisation does not aspire to merge with the proletariat as a whole. It seeks rather to overcome the unevenness of workers' consciousness, and to focus their struggles on the conquest of power. Centralism within a revolutionary organisation is the struggle to generalise, to learn from the experience of particular struggles, but then to locate them within an overall strategy. Secondly, if the revolutionary party is to be a party of action and not an observer of events, then debate must terminate sooner or later in a decision.

The widest possible democracy in debate must be matched by unanimity in applying the majority decision. Thirdly, a degree of centralisation is forced on the revolutionary party by the nature of its opponent. Socialist organisation is forced to mirror the centralised structures of the capitalist state it seeks to overthrow.

There is a more general issue beyond this third point. The authors of *Beyond the Fragments* attack the Leninist party for its centralism. Socialist organisation, they urge, should seek to prefigure the liberated society of the future. Our model should be the various 'new social movements' (feminists, gays etc) which reject the authoritarian structures of capitalism.

This argument is a recipe for abandoning any struggle against capitalism. Such a struggle must, sooner or later, confront the centralised apparatus of state violence.

Unless it is overthrown, socialism will remain simply a Utopia, a pretty dream with which to comfort ourselves amid the grey reality of capitalism. Only the collective strength of the working class can match the power of the capitalist state. But, as we have already seen, that strength can triumph only if it assumes a centralised form.

A society without classes is indeed prefigured in the organisations which workers have built to combat capitalism. Mass struggles throw up much more radically democratic forms in the shape of soviets. Leninist strategy does not seek to substitute the revolutionary party for workers' self-activity, merely to centre it on the state. As Trotsky put it, 'a revolutionary organisation is not the prototype of the future state, but merely the instrument of its creation.'

Strategy and tactics

Much of this article has devoted itself to the question of revolution. But, of course, socialists have usually to deal with the more mundane issues of struggle within the framework of capitalism. Revolutionary organisation lives on the borders of the struggle within capitalism, the mainly trade union battle to improve workers' conditions and resist attempts to intensify their exploitation inside the framework of existing society, and the struggle against capitalism — the revolutionary battle for state power.

Here one of our chief debts to Lenin is the distinction between strategy and tactics. Revolutionary strategy has as its objective the overthrow of capitalism. However, a variety of different tactics may be used to achieve this goal — trade union work, the united front, standing for elections, armed struggle. The reformist and the ultra-left make the error of confusing strategy with some specific tactic — the electoral struggle in one case, armed insurrection in the other.

Lenin grasped more clearly than anyone before him that strategy is the system of different tactics used to achieve the goal of proletarian revolution. The appropriate tactics will vary with the circumstances — when the 1905 revolution was still going on Lenin advocated a boycott of the Duma, the Tsar's parliament, but when defeat was obvious, Lenin switched to support for contesting Duma elections.

The revolutionary has to combine enormous tactical flexibility with clarity and firmness about the ultimate goal. This combination requires the ability to make 'concrete analyses of concrete situations' which Lenin described as the 'soul of Marxism'. As the situation changes, so then must socialist tactics. Lenin's greatness lay above all in his capacity to grasp changes in circumstances, and to adjust the party's course accordingly, never forgetting the ultimate objective.

Lenin's clarity and sense of the concrete, his orientation on the working class as the agent of change and his grasp of the centrality of politics, his commitment to workers' power and his understanding of the decisive role of the party — all these make his thought of the most urgent importance to socialists today.

1984 was his worst book...

1984 is here at last and the deluge of cold war propaganda using that famous number has already begun. **John Deason** writes about the parts of George Orwell other political theories cannot reach.

Animal Farm and *1984* are possibly the two most widely read books written by an English author this century. It is now 1984. Television and newspapers will be bombarding us with a stereotyped explanation of Orwell's last work.

From GCE O-level syllabuses to last year's Book Marketing Council's list of '13 best novels of our time'—Orwell is presented as the public school rebel who tried to identify with the down and outs. He fought in Spain. He wrote neat prose. He first supported the left, then despaired of it. He rejected communism to write his masterpiece — *1984*.

How many O-level passes were gained with such a synopsis? However, what may satisfy the Associated Examining Board does not satisfy reality.

Orwell was a great prose writer, undoubtedly. But above all he was a self-confessed political writer. And judged by his own standards *1984* was his worst book. Its massive distribution by right wing American publishers just after the Second World War added one more bit of fuel to the cold war histrionics.

It is a book overwhelmed by gloom and foreboding. A warring world divided between three superpowers, Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia. Oppression is total. The lone one-man rebellion of Winston Smith is doomed to failure. Party rule is absolute, newspeak unalterable and the proles defeated.

It is a highly political book but—unlike his other work—without hope. We are denied even the right to fight. And that is its biggest failing.

Animal Farm

Animal Farm was the other book to be widely read in Orwell's own lifetime. His previous writings up until then had been confined largely to the left. His biggest audience prior to these last two books was through the Left Book Club of the 1930s and *Tribune* during the war years.

In 1947 Orwell was still fit enough to defend *Animal Farm* against rightist interpretations. By the time *1984* was published he was ill, depressed and dying.

Animal Farm is full of glimpses of an egalitarian utopia. Unlike *1984* it is not about the unbeatable oligarchy. *Animal Farm* was aimed at the left. It is about Russia and the

revolution betrayed, but certainly is not without hope.

Animal Farm was an attack on Stalinism. Orwell was for the revolution. His point was that the animals should have gone on sharing the farm.

The rightist misinterpretation of Orwell's work has been cynically exploited since his death. Its basis lay in the consensus of Stalinism that dominated the left throughout Orwell's life. Terrified of Orwell's cutting perception of Stalinism as counter revolution, Stalin's apologists were only too pleased to equate any criticism of Russia with the right wing.

Ironically Orwell's uncompromising opposition to Stalinism meant that for most of his life he struggled to get publishers. Such was the 'orthodoxy' of the left intellectuals. *Animal Farm* was refused by all the leading publishing houses at the time.

Its final draft, coincided with the Tehran talks and the Yalta carve up. The Ministry of Information went to great lengths to prevent its publication—the future sycophants of the cold war did not at that time want criticism of Uncle Joe. It was Stalin at Yalta followed by blind British Left intellectuals that bedded with the right — not Orwell.

Such was the initial success of the Ministry of Information's discreet 'directions' — it could never have been called censorship — that Orwell was prompted to observe:

'Circus dogs jump when the trainer cracks his whip, but the really well trained dog is the one that turns his somersault when there is no whip.'

By the late 1940s samizdat versions of *Animal Farm* were circulating in Eastern Europe. Lest there be any doubt, Orwell himself explained the book's purpose in a preface to the Ukrainian version:

'For the past ten years I have been convinced that the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the socialist movement.'

'On my return from Spain I thought of exposing the Soviet myth in a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone and which could be easily translated into other languages. However the actual details of the story did not come to me for some time until one day (I was living in a small village) I saw a little boy, perhaps ten years old, driving a huge cart horse along a narrow path, whipping it whenever it tried to turn. It struck me that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them, and that men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat.'

'I proceeded to analyse Marx's theory from the animals' point of view...'

Whatever Orwell's political weaknesses, his greatest strength was that he always tried to see things from 'the animals' point of view'. Throughout his life he tried to observe society viewed from the bottom looking up.

Even before his dramatic politicisation in Spain, all his books had that quality.

Even his most despairing book, *1984*, written with tubercular depression, at least viewed total oppression from the view of the oppressed.

Orwell's overwhelming desire to be with the downtrodden was a reaction against his upper middle class upbringing—Eton and the Burmese Imperial Police:

'I felt that I had to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man. I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against the tyrants.'

It was an approach that inevitably led to conflict with the Stalinist orthodoxy that dominated the left, especially the intellectual left of the 30s and 40s.

Born as Eric Arthur Blair, at Motihari in Bengal on 25 June 1903, Orwell was the son of Richard Walmesley Blair, a high ranking civil servant in the Opium Department of the government of India.

Eric Blair received an education normal to a child of his parents' station — St Cyprians Preparatory School followed by a scholarship to Eton. At Eton he read widely but became academically a drop out. He didn't progress to Oxford or Cambridge but joined the Burmese Police. He gradually came to reject imperialism and its racism.

Colonial racists

Throughout his writings, Orwell drew heavily on his own experiences. His writings have been described as 'journalism as art'. In *Burmese Days* Orwell savagely attacked the racism he had endured first hand. Ellis, a character fictitious in name only, is the colonial racist par excellence. Orwell describes Ellis reacting to the incorporation of one Burmese into the white sanctum: '...sitting down at a table with him as though he was a white man, and drinking out of glasses his filthy black lips have slobbered over...it makes me spew to think about it.' Later in 1940 he was to write in *Time and Tide*:

'In Burma I have listened to racist theories which were less brutal than Hitler's theories about the Jews, but certainly not less idiotic...I have often heard it said, for instance, that no white man can sit on his heels in the same attitude as an oriental — the attitude incidentally in which coal miners sit when they eat their dinners in the pit.'

On returning from Burma, Eric Blair under the pseudonym Orwell — initially used to avoid embarrassment for his family, who were bitterly disappointed at their son's 'failure' in Burma — worked hard at writing. For someone who was to develop such a simple style it is interesting that it did not come easily — he had to work at it. Although he initially dabbled with the idea of literary writing and reviewing for the sake of it, his growing politicisation was to dominate his writings.

Orwell chose to go tramping, ruining his health in the process. The result was *Down and Out in London and Paris*. He also went hop picking. Significantly, he saw the work-



ing class through the eyes of the lumpen.

Politically the weakness was his lack of contact with the organised working class. But nonetheless, for someone with Orwell's background it was an amazing feat. And his desire to be 'on their side against the tyrants' remained with him for the rest of his life.

Gollancz, the Left Book Club publisher, sent Orwell to report on conditions in the Northern coal mining areas — which led to Orwell's celebrated *Road to Wigan Pier*. Through it Orwell discovered the working class, as compared to the lumpen-proletariat of Whitechapel and La Seine. But even in *Road to Wigan Pier* — the first half of which is a brutally moving description of the poverty and ravages of working class life in the 30s — there is no mention of the struggle and power of workers, only of their oppression.

The National Unemployed Workers' Movement is not mentioned. Orwell arrived in Wigan just after the massive Lancashire textile strikes, but these too are not mentioned.

By this time Orwell was mixing in left circles — the Independent Labour Party mainly. Individual Communist Party members put Orwell up in Wigan, though the only political event they took him to was an early Mosley rally. His ties to the ILP were cemented by regular contributions to the *Adelphi Magazine*.

He remained apart from organised politics. The second half of *Road to Wigan Pier* is a description of his confused path to socialism — idiosyncratic and highly contro-

versial. He very quickly shrank from the Stalinised Communist Party and from the Russian 'Marxist' orthodoxy that dominated the intellectual left. He described Russian Commissars as 'half gramophone, half gangster', and said, 'An account of the English class system expounded by an orthodox Communist is like watching somebody carve a roast duck with a chopper'. He completely dismissed the crankiness of the trendy left — the 'swamp' of the 1930s: 'all that dreary tribe of high minded women and sandal-wearers and bearded fruit-juice drinkers who come flocking towards the smell of "progress" like bluebottles to a dead cat'.

Workers' Barcelona

Orwell was too radical for the Labour Party, rightly sensed the dangers of Stalinism, and abhorred the ILP's lack of feel for real workers. Sandal wearers and bearded fruit juice drinkers were not capable of relating to the workers of Wigan amongst whom Orwell had moved, briefly lived with, and admired.

Was there any revolutionary alternative for Orwell to join? The then Trotskyists were very small. There is no evidence that Orwell had even heard of them. It is one of the ironies of historical accident that Orwell just missed meeting Reg Groves, one of the founder members of the Trotskyist Balham group. Orwell took on the job of running a left wing bookshop in Hampstead where his immediate predecessor had been Reg Groves! As Orwell walked in, the possibility

of an encounter with revolutionary socialism walked out. Orwell's introduction to revolutionary socialism was to be delayed until 1936 and the Spanish Civil War.

Orwell went to Spain to fight, not to write: 'there aren't so many fascists if we all kill one...' He arrived, politically naive and basically in agreement with the Communist Party that 'the war against Franco must be won first, worry about the revolution afterwards'.

He joined the POUM militia through ILP introductions and very quickly became a platoon leader.

He was immediately inspired by the workers' control of Barcelona. 'You can actually see it here,' he wrote to his friend Cyril Connolly. Very quickly he moved to accept a revolutionary attitude towards the civil war, seeing in the workers' councils of Barcelona much more than just a front against fascism. Workers' revolution, workers' power was the way to defeat Franco and the way to socialism.

His book *Homage to Catalonia* is a wonderful description of that flowering of workers' power.

Not surprisingly for a political writer, writing and political inspiration fed off each other. It remains his best work — the perfect antidote to *1984* — infused with workers' struggle.

The book was written on his return from Spain, to counter the lies and distortions of the Stalinists. No artistic licence was allowed for the plot, names or events. He meticulously reported and interpreted the events he fought through. He found himself in Barcelona when the Republican government, egged on by the Communist Party, turned on workers' organisation. Armed police were sent in to disarm the workers' militias. The anarchists in the CNT and the leftists of the POUM went to the barricades. Orwell never hesitated about which side to join.

'The poorer classes in Barcelona looked upon the Civil Guard as something rather resembling the Black and Tans, and it seemed to be taken for granted that they had started this attack on their own initiative. The issue was clear enough. On the one side, the CNT, on the other side the police. I have no particular love for the "idealised" worker as he appears in the bourgeois Communist's mind, but when I see an actual flesh and blood worker in conflict with his natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask myself which side I am on.'

Orwell was literally hounded out of Spain by the Stalinist GPU agents. André Nin, leader of the POUM (who made a bigger impression on Orwell than Trotsky), was assassinated. Orwell's friend from the militia, Bob Smillie (son of the Scottish miners' leader), was arrested by the GPU and died in Valencia prison. As the revolution was murdered the way was paved for Franco's victory. It was a lesson that was to shape the next few years — the most political of Orwell's life.

On returning from Spain, Orwell threw himself into active politics, in defence of the potential revolution that he had witnessed.

and against the Stalinism of counter revolution. He joined what seemed, warts and all, the only available organisation—the Independent Labour Party.

There is no evidence that Orwell read Trotsky on Spain, or Trotsky's criticism of the POUM's centrism. It was one thing to be on the right side of the barricades with the POUM. It was quite another to lead forward from the barricades. But it is quite remarkable how similar Orwell's analysis was to that of Trotsky. In particular, Orwell saw through both the opportunism and counter revolutionary nature of the popular front strategy.

'A real mass party'

Orwell's politically formative years coincided with the decline of the ILP. The Trotskyists in Britain were still miniscule. Fascism was sweeping across a Europe of defeated working class movements. Stalin was consolidating his oligarchy in the East. It was a desperately lonely period for revolutionaries. The absence of a revolutionary party in Britain, even a small party, was to leave Orwell, along with many others, to vacillate politically during the war. They were left as individuals, buffeted by events against which only a tough Marxist organisation could have held a line.

In July 1939 Orwell wrote in the *Adelphi*:

'Nothing is likely to save us except the emergence within the next two years of a real mass party whose first pledges are to refuse war and to right imperial injustice. But if any such party exists at present, it is only as a possibility, in a few tiny germs lying here and there in unwatered soil.'

Orwell responded to the Hitler-Stalin pact by shifting from his previous revolutionary defeatism to a kind of left wing patriotism, expressed in two essays, 'My Country Right or Left' and 'The Lion and the Unicorn'. He championed the Home Guard as a potentially revolutionary people's militia.

Politically he gravitated toward *Tribune*, indeed became its literary editor. In a series of often brilliant articles entitled 'As I Please', Orwell became a left wing Dr Johnson. His politics were a product of the times and his isolation, but much of his writing in this period is still of worth. Orwell often attacked the philistinism of those that criticised or praised literary style and aestheticism according to their agreement or disagreement with its political line. We should afford him the same.

As Orwell wrote in one 'As I Please' column: 'I had better not continue too long on this subject, because the last time I mentioned flowers in this column an indignant lady wrote to say that flowers are bourgeois...'

There is much more to Orwell than defence of flowers. And there is much more than the depressing hopelessness of 1984.

From *Road to Wigan Pier* onwards he wrote from and for the left. In Spain and for a period after he was a revolutionary. During the war he eventually reverted to centrism and the Labour left. He deserves to be rescued from Channel 4 and the Book Marketing Council — and the best way to do that is go out and read *Homage to Catalonia*.

Print patriarchs?

Ann Rogers reviews Cynthia Cockburn's book *Brothers* (Pluto Press, £5.95) on the NGA.

This book now looks rather dated. It is an analysis of sexism in the printing industry, especially among the highly paid, highly skilled compositors. Cockburn claims that the craft compositors in the print and especially in Fleet Street, are so riddled with sexism and a sectional craftism that they are unable to fight for anything other than their very narrow immediate interests.

But it was the craftist/sexist NGA which came nearest to smashing the Tory employment laws. The reasons they failed were all too familiar to socialists. Their lack of confidence led to a reliance on the trade union bureaucracy. That bureaucracy was unwilling and unable to act in the interests of the workers it supposedly represents.

What *wasn't* a significant factor during the dispute was the compositors' attitude to women. Most NGA militants realised the importance of fighting alongside NUJ and SOGAT members—both also facing injunctions at the time and both having many women members. When the working class moves feminists' analysis tends to be left rather stranded.

After all, it rests upon the belief that most workers are hopelessly compromised by capitalism and share its interests in oppressing women. When male workers begin to fight such an analysis is shown to be completely untrue.

But still, Cockburn does raise an important point. In the print, as in most industries, women have the worst paid and least skilled jobs. It is the explanation which she gives for this which is dubious. For Cockburn, as for all feminists, the fact that men gain from women's oppression is taken as obvious. Once this assumption is made she has to set up a spurious theoretical framework to explain it.

So she argues that there are two ways in which the world must be understood—from a 'class' perspective and from a 'sex-gender' perspective. What on earth a 'sex gender' perspective *is* Cockburn only explains vaguely in terms of a mystical notion of 'male power'.

Having rejected the idea that there are institutions or practices which operate *purely* in terms of sex she ends up saying:

'The sex gender system is to be found in all the same practices and processes in which the mode of production and its class relations are to be found.'

'Families, factories, schools, trade unions—these are class institutions ... But they are all gendered too, their practices and processes are those of patriarchy as well as class'.

As Cockburn admits that all those in-

stitutions are *class* institutions she has to identify what it is about them which cannot be explained by a marxist analysis. She thinks that marxism cannot explain why women occupy a disadvantaged position within these institutions.

But a closer look at a factory or a family or whatever shows that it is class not sex which determines the position of women within them. The oppression which a working class woman suffers is qualitatively different from anything which a ruling class woman undergoes.

Ruling class women in factories (as shareholders, managers etc) may suffer sexism in relation to ruling class men, but they will certainly hold the balance of power over their male, as well as their female workers. Their class position means that they are not oppressed by the great majority of men. In fact the opposite—they have power over the lives of working class men.

Material benefits

The ruling class woman in the family may be disadvantaged vis a vis her husband, but in a completely different way from a working class woman. She will not bear the double burden of housework and a job. She will not suffer from cuts in welfare services or increased unemployment. She materially benefits from the exploitation of workers both men and women through her high standard of living. In education girls may be at a disadvantage to boys, but privately educated children, both boys and girls, have massive advantages over working class kids.

Trade unions may be male dominated, but can anyone really suggest that they are organs of male power? Are working class women really better off without them?

Cockburn claims:

'Whether a person is male or female may well have as much impact upon individual life chances as whether a person is a member of the ruling class as the working class.'

But again, once you look closely at this claim it is shown to be nonsense. Your life expectancy, housing conditions, the food you eat, whether you work—all depend far more on class than on sex. Where there is a difference between men and women it is inextricably bound up with class.

It only makes sense to talk about working class women's oppression (or, conversely ruling class women's oppression). To talk of 'women's oppression' as if it cuts across class boundaries is senseless.

The same applies to male advantages in comparison with women. The male employer who exploits a cheap female workforce benefits from the disadvantaged position of women workers. The male worker who earns more than most women workers doesn't. Indeed the fact that women constitute a pool of cheap labour is dangerous for his wages.

It would be far better for him if female workers earned the same as him. The recent history of the NGA shows this very well—the long term strategy of the print bosses is to get rid of well paid and well organised men and employ badly paid, badly organised women. Working class men have no interest in women's disadvantage within this society. Ruling class men do.

Women are disadvantaged because they reproduce the next generation of labour for capital (not for men). In fact having babies occupies very little of their working life, about five years full time, but it has a disproportionate effect on their work patterns.

They are pushed out of the higher echelons of white collar work, and out of the skilled jobs. They tend to take jobs which fit in with commitments to childcare. Their worklives are determined by looking after children, not looking after men. They will take low paid part time jobs so they can pick their children up from school. They will work twilight shifts so their husbands can mind the children. Working class women are tied to servicing children, not to servicing men.

But like all the other institutions of capitalism the family functions partly by convincing those who participate in it that it is natural, inevitable and good. So it's hardly surprising that Cockburn discovers male composers who think that a woman's place is in the home.

Working class men, like the printers in Cockburn's study, certainly have sexist ideas. But is it true that 'men as a whole' have benefitted from women's exclusion from the highest paid jobs in the print?

The press barons on Fleet Street did not award the printers high wages because they were men. They get high wages because they fought for them. And it certainly doesn't 'benefit' Robert Maxwell or Rupert Murdoch who pay these wages. Far from being in some sort of all-male conspiracy with the printers they would far rather employ women at lower rates.

The problem with Cockburn's book is that she accepts what the male printers she interviewed say, pretty much without question. She gives no real explanation about why they have the ideas they do, and even less about how and when these ideas are likely to change. So she ends up distorting Gramsci in an effort to show that there is something called 'male hegemony' which makes 'alternatives unthinkable' and 'forces women into compliance'.

But on the picket line at Warrington alternatives did become thinkable. Within a few hours all sorts of ideas which a printer might have held for years—that the British police were wonderful, or that women have no part to play in trade union activity went. As the NGA dispute grew it became obvious to many Fleet Street craftsmen that they could not afford to be isolated. They began arguing that the provincial papers and the general printers should be pulled out. The 'alternative' of women taking industrial action had become 'thinkable'.

Because Cockburn doesn't understand how workers move she has no conception of the speed and changes of direction of the

class struggle. So she ends up making general statements which are plainly ridiculous.

So she quotes Serge Mallet who says:

'Workers in the archaic (sic) industries like coal mining, building and textiles can no longer develop revolutionary ideology and behaviour in the workers'.

Perhaps he should tell that to the shipyard workers of Gdansk, or even the miners of Britain in 1972.

But apart from factual inaccuracies there is a more profound mistake in this sort of analysis.

Revolutionary ideology and behaviour does not spring from nowhere—it has to be built. And it is built by that small number of socialists, rooted in the workplace, whose ideas will strike a chord when the mass of workers begin to feel confident.

Bypassing activity

When workers are confident about changing their immediate conditions, winning the narrow sectional demands for more wages or whatever, they will be open to arguments about all sorts of things which they have accepted for years. This happened to some extent during the recent dispute. If that dispute had been won it would have happened on a far larger scale.

Cockburn doesn't really understand this process. So she tries to think up plans and blueprints which can bypass workers' lack of activity and ideas, rather than work to change them. This is at best pointless and at worst downright dangerous.

To take one example near the end of the book. Cockburn suggests that the way to overcome the sexism and craftism of composers is by having one big media union, which would 'embody a much wider class consciousness'. This may all be true in the abstract, but in the real world an amalgamation of the print unions at the moment would be a disaster for the workers in those unions.

At the moment the NGA bureaucracy is

fighting for its own existence. If new technology is introduced the union itself will be under threat. And so will the company cars, the high salaries, the jobs for life which go with being a full time bureaucrat. But there is an alternative to fighting, and one which will look increasingly attractive as the going gets hot. That is an amalgamation with another print union.

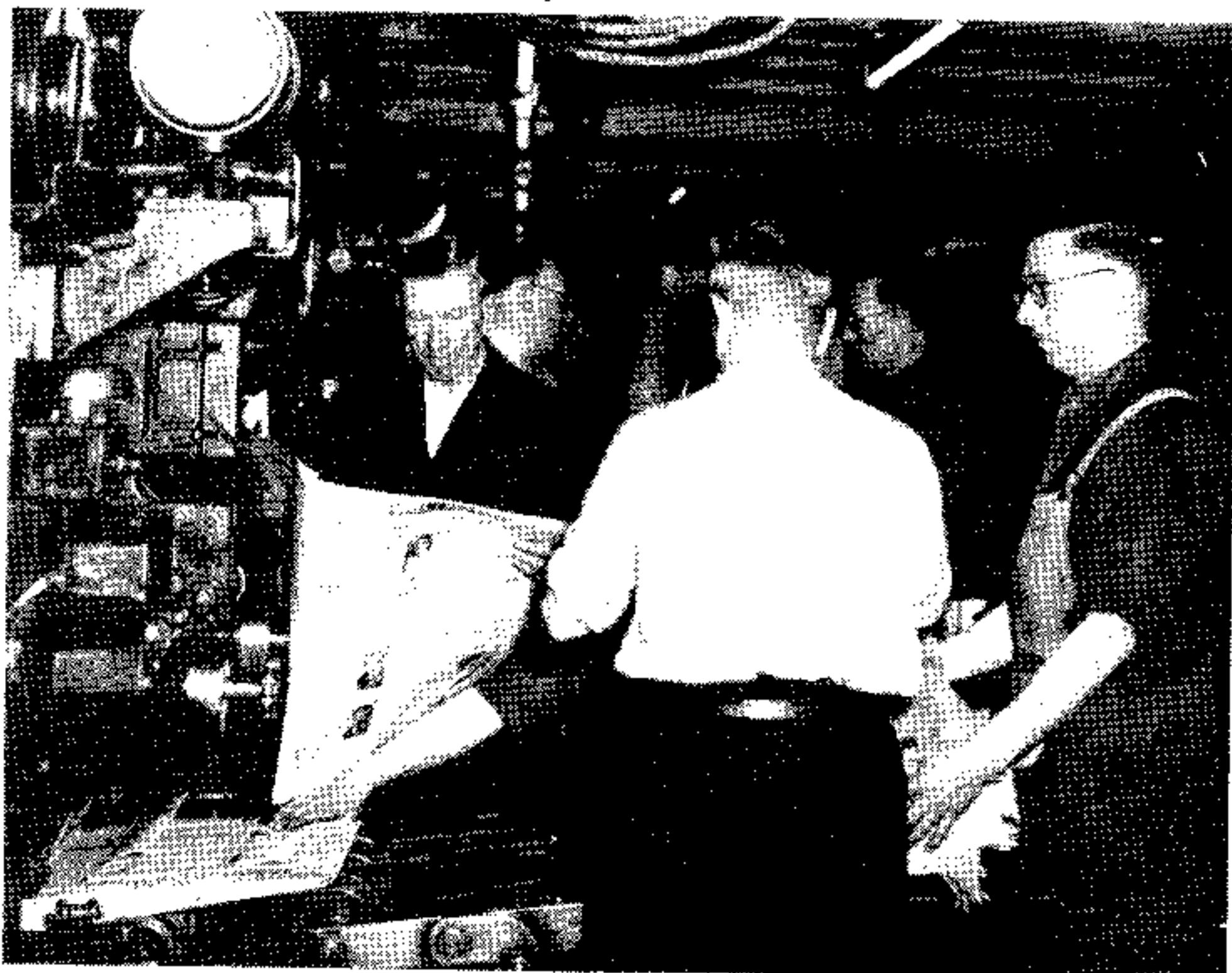
It is in what Cockburn calls the 'smash and grab of free collective bargaining' that workers realise their strength. Any serious attempt to improve workers' conditions at the moment is going to come smack up against the Tory employment laws. If workers are to defend themselves they will have to smash the Tories.

This would do women far more good than all the feminist ideas in the world. Firstly because working women need their unions which the Tories are trying to destroy, secondly because working class women need health and welfare services, which the Tories are cutting to the bone.

Capitalism will always try to split the working class. Whether along lines of sex, race or skill. Different sections of the class will be in the forefront of fighting capitalism at different times. Anyone who calls themselves a socialist will support these workers no matter which section of the class they come from. I don't know whether Cockburn would accept this, but certainly many people who gave her book laudatory praise do not.

On the 2 December the *New Statesman* ran an editorial which vacillated on whether or not to support the NGA because they are 'craftist', 'elitist' and afraid of technological change. Cockburn's book has provided an opportunity for rapidly rightward moving ex-activists to justify themselves in trendy feminist terms.

Cockburn complains that an analysis of gender gets lost in a marxist analysis. But separating gender off from marxism leads to an abandonment of class politics altogether.



Ideas without action

Socialist Arguments

edited by David Coates and Gordon Johnston

Martin Robertson £5.95

According to Tony Benn, writing in the *Guardian* (20.6.83),

'...for the first time since 1945 a political party with an openly socialist policy has received the support of over eight and a half million people...it is indeed astonishing that socialism has reappeared once more upon the national agenda and has won such a large vote.'

The editors and most of the contributors to this book have no time for that kind of hollow rhetoric. Writing *before* the general election in which the Labour Party got its lowest percentage of the total vote since 1918, the editors note 'the shallowness of its (the Labour left's — DH) roots in the wider society', the 'absence of any broadly based belief in the efficacy and desirability of a socialist alternative, 'the paradox at the heart of the British left's present dilemma, the parallel absence of capitalist economic stability and mass support for a socialist alternative'.

They are therefore *incomparably*

more realistic than Comrade Benn and his deluded acolytes, not to mention the self-deluded 'entrists' in the Labour Party. That is a merit and a very considerable merit.

It is, however, to define the matter negatively. What, actually, do the contributors to this volume have in common apart from a recognition that socialist ideas, not to mention socialist activity, are very much minority concerns? This is true even in the working class (however defined) let alone in 'the wider society'.

I take a summary of their position from the publisher's blurb — admittedly not the responsibility of any contributor but in this case not at all inaccurate:

'The editors are both members of the Socialist Society. This book contributes to that Society's aim — of creating a sophisticated and widely understood socialist counter-culture, and of winning mass support for socialist ideas.'

It is a seductive notion, especially for those who earn their living by the discussion of — one might almost say the trade in — ideas, debates, criticism.

Moreover it has some apparently weighty precedents. Some works of Gramsci (although hardly the Gramsci of *The Modern Prince* on any candid reading) may be and have been interpreted in the sense that 'hegemony' in the field of ideas must be the central objective for socialists and can, in principle, be achieved by 'independent' socialist intellectuals. There is an obvious British precedent too, although it is not cited in this work, of which the subtitle is 'Socialist Primer No. 1'. This is an echo, conscious or not, of the 'Primers for an Age of Plenty', written by Hogben in the late thirties.

Now Hogben's works (*Mathematics for the Million*, *Science for the Citizen*) were immensely influential contributions to socialist argument and conviction as well as quite brilliant expositions of basic (if somewhat dated) scientific ideas. Immensely influential by an objective test: 400,000 copies of *Mathematics for the Million* and 370,000 of *Science for the Citizen* were said to have been sold by 1946.

But this success has to be seen in a political context. Hogben himself was never a Stalinist but his whole approach fitted in beautifully with the 'Popular Front' line of the Communist International.

I cite this example not to denigrate Hogben. His works — like those of the real Stalinist J.D. Bernal

on broadly similar themes — are well worth re-reading today.

Rather I have cited it to draw attention to a basic truth. It was the Communist Party, small as it was, Stalinist as it was, that played an absolutely essential role in creating the situation in which Hogben, the more important Left Book Club and the rest, could influence the 'wider society'. Without the Communist party, without the rebuilding of its industrial base in the late thirties, without *its* intellectuals, the whole intellectual development, such as it was, would have been aborted.

Which brings us to the Socialist Society. Founded early in 1982, its true name is — equivocation; not revolutionary (my God, no!) not uncompromisingly parliamentarian — that might upset some potential supporters, but neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring.

Is that unfair? The introduction to the book states:

'The project of which this volume is part was prompted by the enormous imbalance of intellectual resources that exists between those who would defend capitalism in crisis and those who would replace it by a democratic socialism.'

Well, yes. The 'imbalance' is there, as it must be, so long as the balance of forces between the reformists, (including the Bennite reformists), and the revolutionaries in the workers' movement favours the former.

To alter that balance of forces requires a combination of circumstance and will. Above all it requires a nucleus of *revolutionaries*. Circumstance we cannot control, will we can. The question is, do the contributors to this volume have the conviction and the will to destroy British capitalism?

Perhaps some do, most don't. The result is a mish-mash in which Frank Field, persecutor of Militant, writes one of the best, at least clearest and most unequivocal pieces (on the Welfare State). But he is an unequivocal opponent of revolutionary socialism, and to be fair to him, has never pretended to be anything else.

So what of the 'building a whole socialist counter-culture' which the editors proclaim? A 'counter-culture' means, *must* mean, a revolutionary culture.

It can't be done in alliance with the Frank Fields or with the less honest and less involved academics who make up most of the contributors to this book.

There is a great deal of useful information in the book. At £5.95 it is not a bad buy. But in terms of 'winning recruits to our cause', as the editors put it, it is a non-starter.

The determination of the editors to avoid what they call 'gratuitous sectarianism' ensures that all the real and *immediate* issues are evaded. Read this book for information, not for politics.

Duncan Hallas

LETTERS

Socialist Review's reporting of the Grenada invasion was praised in a letter last month. I want to disagree. It is all very well for people sitting in comfort in Britain to criticise the efforts of socialists in the third world, but they have to do something.

Bishop and the New Jewel Movement found themselves running a backward economy dominated by imperialism. The working class is tiny and the trade unions were heavily infiltrated by the CIA.

In those circumstances to talk about 'workers' power' or other SWP-type phrases is just nonsense. The only way forward for Bishop and the NJM was to try to break their country from imperialist domination and to develop the political consciousness of the masses.

What would the SWP do in the same circumstances? Hand things over to the same old gangsters?

Of course nobody can defend the murder of Bishop, but to criticise that is one thing. To attack the whole of the record of the New Jewel Movement is typical SWP sectarianism.

Grenada was just one small case. Over most of the world socialists find themselves in a similar situation. The ideas of the SWP

might be fine for Britain, but they are no use at all to the overwhelming majority of the world's population.

Jo Hanson, Hull

I set out reading Gareth Jenkins' article 'Saving the Socialist Republic' full of hope. Your intro promised an answer to the question: 'How should the fightback be organised?'

The answers were: 'We fight on jobs and conditions,' we translate opposition into 'rank and file activity', and we resist with 'independent working class activity'.

But you have a problem here. Because you have been announcing the downturn for the last few years, you wound down your Rank and File organisations.

Take the teachers for example. Rank and File Teacher was a large, effective organisation taking a principled, uncompromising stand on jobs and conditions.

You wound it down, leaving the ground to 'revolutionary Labour Party entrists' who are now busy snuggling up with their Labour Party employers.

The rank and file approach that Gareth Jenkins espouses, you've effectively squashed. There's only about 3-4 months left in the Save ILCA campaign. It will be won or

lost by then. So far SWP members have been conspicuous by their absence or their 'told-you-so' defeatism.

I support Gareth Jenkins' article 100 percent — it's your comrades who don't.

Michael Rosen
E. London

I find it odd that *Socialist Review* should be on the same side as the Tories in constantly attacking the GLC and left Labour councils. Even some Tories now see the attack on metropolitan boroughs as an attack on local democracy.

Against all the lies of the media and the Tory government the GLC and others are carrying on to improve the lives of people in the community, including the workers who you claim to care so much for. All that *Socialist Review* ever seems to do is to snipe from the side lines and join in with the Tory attacks.

If the left spent as much time attacking Thatcher and this government as they do in attacking each other and making sectarian points we would not have to live under such a government as we do. It was divisions within the left that let Thatcher in and it is divisions such as this that keep her in power.

Edward Stonehill
N London

The Federation

History of the General Federation of Trade Unions, 1899-1980

Alice Prochaska
Allen and Unwin, £15

Who has heard of the General Federation of Trade Unions? I must admit that all I know about it was gleaned from two short references in Cole and Postgate's *The Common People*, the last relating to 1914, and that I had assumed that it had long departed from the land of the living.

Quite wrong. The GFTU is still with us and had (in 1980) forty-one affiliated unions with a total membership of nearly 500,000, most of them also affiliated to the TUC.

Its continued existence is a striking testimonial to the ability of an organisational machine, given certain minimum material resources and an ability to adapt to changing conditions, to long outlast the circumstances in which it was born and to which it had relevance.

The GFTU was a product of the

upsurge of working class struggle in the late 80s and early 90s of the last century (the first mass struggles since the 1840s). It was pushed and promoted by socialists on the basis that it would be 'one big fighting federation', as opposed to the feeble Lib/Lab dominated TUC.

It finally got off the ground in 1899, the year before the Labour Party.

Somewhere along the road, in 1930 as a matter of fact, the GFTU acquired a substantial asset — a seven story building in Upper Woburn Place. With the post-war boom in London office rents this was a prize worth catching and some affiliates proposed to wind up the GFTU and divide up the proceeds.

They were foiled in 1949 and the GFTU lingers on. Ms Prochaska makes a valiant attempt to show that it serves some useful purpose. The kindest thing that can be said is that she is an able advocate making the best of a hopeless case.

Duncan Hallas

Workers in Wales

The Welsh in their History

Gwyn A Williams
Croom Helm £11.95.

For too long the history of Wales has been the history of 'Welsh Wales' — the Welsh speaking heartland of the West and North.

It is only in relatively recent years that historians have turned their attention towards the South and East of the country (where by far the majority of people live) and looked at the lives and histories of the 'Anglo-Welsh.'

This latter history is basically the study of the Welsh working class. A study of 200 years at most. From when it began in the little villages at the heads of the mining valleys, to the present day when, according to Gwyn Williams, Wales is 'living through the morning after a night before which lasted four generations ...'

Nobody has done as much to help us understand this 'new labour history' than Professor Gwyn Williams — Professor of History at Cardiff University.

Although perhaps not the first, it is he who has inspired countless others so that now Wales is seemingly teeming with young historians burrowing into details of the lives of our ancestors.

However he is not just a historian of the working class — although as a marxist this has always been his prime concern — he is also as a Welsh-speaking, Welshman concerned about the nature of 'Wales'

as a country.

What is this thing we call Wales, he asks in his book. Where has it come from — and more importantly — will it survive?

To examine these questions he goes right back into history to the days of that Welsh wizard of the renaissance, John Dee, through the days of dissent and non-conformity to the beginnings of the growth of the industrial working class. And what he finds — detailed in his own highly impressionistic pictorial way — is a relationship between Wales and Britain that is highly complex and not so one-way as some historians would have us believe.

Williams, thank God, eschews the colonial argument of the nationalists which holds true for Ireland but which just won't do for Wales. Indeed he has a good go at all those professional Welshmen who hang around the pubs of Cardiff.

'It becomes a question of style, of accent, of historically acquired manners, of half understood hymns sung on ritual occasions, a question of trivialities.'

Instead he says Wales has contributed greatly to British capitalism. In a sense its own existence can only be defined by its relationship to Britain. So if we have suffered greatly as a result of that capitalism it is not a mythical 'Wales' which has suffered so much as the Welsh working class. But then so to have the working classes

of England and Scotland.

In his last essay Williams speculates on the future of working Wales. If it survives he says it will be due to an exercise of the will rather than by economic certainty. 'Nations do not grow like trees, they are manufactured' he says ... 'If we want Wales we will have to make Wales.'

There's no doubting what

Williams wants. As the romantic (to which he admits endearingly) he is desperate for Wales to survive. However as a marxist he is realist enough to know this will not happen under capitalism. It can only happen as an act of will which in turn necessitates a system in which markets do not prevail — socialism.

Ceri Jones

Romance

They Burn the Thistles

Yashar Kemal
Writers and Readers £3.95

In Turkey this novel was first published under the title *Ince Memed Part 2* in 1969 after the main character of the book Ince Memed and as a follow up to his earlier novel *Memed My Hawk*. It is Memed that has made Kemal famous in Turkey, a character like a cross between Robin Hood and Clint Eastwood, an anti-landlord bandit. Kemal has now written over 10 novels and is Turkey's most famous writer, so famous that they are beginning to appear in English and available in paperback.

Kemal is as interesting as his creation Memed. Born in 1922 he saw his father murdered in a mosque at the age of five. His father was from local feudal stock, his mother from brigands. The shock of the murder so affected him that he developed a severe stammer. He was only free from the stammer when he sang, as a result he developed into an improvised singer in the Anatolian minstrel tradition.

When he was nine he decided he wanted to learn to read and write, to do so he had to walk each day to a distant village. He later worked in the local rice and cotton fields, then became a factory worker. Hounded out of the job because of his support for landless peasants he taught himself to use a typewriter and became a reporter in Istanbul. In 1955 he wrote *Memed My Hawk* and became famous. He also became a member of the Central Committee of the Turkish Workers Party, now banned by the junta.

I've related Kemal's life for it is the stuff of his novels. With this

novel we are in the world of the peasants, hated landlords and bandits some time in the early 20th century. The novel contains beautiful descriptions of the Turkish countryside and concerns the struggle of the peasants against the landlords.

The peasants' hopes lie in Memed the bandit. Kemal shows how the peasantry needs a leader, real or mythical and how the struggle is never-ending. Ince Memed has the recurring vision of a serpent, every-time you cut off the serpent's head, two grow back. Every time you kill a landlord another replaces him. Memed has a crisis, why fight if all you do is to increase the peasants' oppression? In the end he overcomes his angst and kills the chief baddie.

Much of the imagery reminded me of spaghetti westerns and Gorki. The novel contains no workers, towns are parasites on the countryside, hated by the peasants. It is a world of pre-capitalism, at times beautifully written it idealises the countryside and peasant struggles. The book is an uneasy balance of romantic escapism written for the modern town-dweller, and the political lessons of the futility of struggle without a workers' movement. The trouble is that the two clash rather than complement.

The romantic idealising of the struggle means that the political points jar with the lyrical and at times almost surreal beauty of the rest. Memed's angst becomes irritating rather than profound, you just want him to go out and kill the landlord. It's at its best when it sticks to being escapist, describing the lost semi-mythical past.

Noel Halifax

International Socialism

The theoretical journal of the Socialist Workers Party

INCLUDES: Pete Green on Debt, the banks and Latin America, Chris Harman on Philosophy and Revolution, Peter Binns on 'Popular Power' in Cuba and many other articles. Copies available from your Socialist Worker seller or from ISJ, PO box 82, London E2 9DS—£1.50.

Banning the 'nasties'

A bill censoring 'video nasties' will go through parliament with support from all sides of the house. Noel Halifax argues that socialists must oppose the bill.

The introduction of a bill in Parliament to increase state censorship and aimed at 'video nasties' has won all-party support. Such cross-party unity is both rare and ominous. It is usually only at such times as the Second World War or the Falklands or over Ireland that we see such unanimity and each time it means a serious attack on our freedom. This bill is no exception. The establishment of all shades is uniting to increase the state's powers of control over what people can or cannot watch. It is not 1984 for nothing it seems.

This unanimity of opinion in Parliament is for once reflecting a growing consensus outside over the need for censorship. Both some of the left and the right are for once agreed.

The fact that the Tories and the Labour right wish to see a more powerful state with greater powers of control should come as no surprise to any readers of *Socialist Review*, nor their denunciation of the videos undermining the fabric of our family life etc. etc. We already have a controlled and manipulated media operated mostly by the old boy (with the occasional girl) networks that run the BBC and ITV and the millionaires that own the press. It is not surprising that the right would view a new media, such as video, developing without any controls as a deplorable state of affairs.

What is more disturbing is that large sections of the left and some feminists have also been drawn into support for the bill. Censorship, once the cry of the right and the establishment (not to mention the Festival of Light crowd) has now become a cry of some of the left. Not only that, but the arguments put by the pro-censorship left, though different in style from Mary Whitehouse and Co., have an underlying and eerie similarity to them.

To both Mary Whitehouse and the left the reason why people are bad is because of the ideas that they get from the media, especially TV and now video. Of course her definition of bad is very different from the left's, but the analysis remains the same as does the solution—censorship.

To the left being bad means being racist, sexist and taking part in or colluding with violence against women. To the Whitehouses of this world it means not going to church (C of E that is), having sex for fun and not voting Tory. Both see the way to change people's behaviour is

by controlling the ideas that they receive from the media and using state control.

The idea that you can legislate in socialism, is one that is common to all the reformists, from the Stalinists to the Labour left and the Labour right of all shades and variations. Recently this idea of socialism from above has been extended to include sexual liberation and oppression. The blending of reformism in the County Halls with degenerated feminism has given rise to the idea that you can legislate in elements of liberation. It is from that merging of the strands of ideas that the left has gone along with calls for state control and censorship.

The idea of socialism (or liberation) from above is one totally alien and in opposition to socialism as the creation of the workers themselves, the self-activity of the working-class. Or indeed the idea of the early gay and women's movements which saw liberation as the result of struggle and self-activity, not imposed from on high by the courts and the state. It is no doubt a result of the low level of struggle that such ideas are now so common, but they contain dangerous illusions particularly about the nature and role of the state.

Since the 80s the women's movement as a real cohesive movement that held conferences, voted on policy etc. has ceased to exist. With its fragmentation the commitment to the WLM is no longer a real functioning body but a mystical ideal by definition undefined. At the same time many Labour left councils have set up women's and gay sub-committees into which many of the old activists have been drawn. These sub-committees are there to represent the women's movement and the gay community, but they are unelected and unaccountable, they represent only a commitment to the mystical 'movement' and a set of vague ideals.

In all senses of the word they are isolated from the outside world and from any form of struggle, but drawn towards the reformism of the labour councils. It is this meeting of council reformism and elements from the 'movements' that has given birth to the idea of using the state to liberate. Ironically the very people who were most opposed to Leninist parties because they saw them as leading to Stalinist societies are the ones now calling for more censorship and Stalin-like thought control.

It is odd that people who have year after year documented and shown the sexist and racist behaviour of the police, the attitude of the judges to rape cases, the action of the army in Ireland etc. now see it possible to use these same



institutions to decrease violence and ban nasty videos.

The state is not a neutral body which we can look to to help us in our fight against sexism or any thing else. It is our main oppressor and enemy. During the 30s the government of the time gave itself extra powers on the excuse that it would use them to ban and combat Mosley's fascists. Some of the left of the time, in fact most of it, supported this 'progressive' move. Those powers were rarely if ever used against the fascists but often used against us. Any new power of censorship given to the state will be used against us. Calling for more powers for the state is literally arming our main enemy.

But if we do not support the state in ridding the world of violence how do we move towards a nicer, less oppressive world? People come to have nasty and reactionary ideas in their heads not primarily because of the programmes that they see but because of the lives that they live and the ideas they get from the media then fit into a picture of the world which they themselves experience.

The world or people would not be made any more peaceful by banning a few videos, it would be all very easy if that were the case. If anything it would be sinister if the world we live in was horrible and full of violence (mass starvation, carnage in Lebanon, poverty etc. etc.) and yet this violence was hidden and not reflected on the screen or in popular culture. It is because violence is built-in to the structure of society and because the world is getting more violent that this is reflected on the video films. You do not change reality by smashing its mirrors.

Finally there is the need to

answer the argument most often used for the bill, the need to protect children. This starts from a very dubious assumption that children are different from adults and need to be protected from violent fiction (has anyone ever read Grimm's 'fairy tales?') which I find hard to believe. The argument also involves such depths of hypocrisy that it is hard to take it too seriously.

Unemployment, poverty, child battering, rape inside the family and all such associated evils are horribly common in Britain with four million on the dole and the living standards of the unemployed being cut. These are real attacks on the welfare and innocence of children compared to which a few video nasties pale to nothing. With children subjected to real violence all the time as part of 'normal' reality it is doubtful if the fictional violence does anything to corrupt kids.

Only if real violence is imposed on children will fictional violence have any meaning. Just as comic books and Popeye did not cause the Second World War (or ripping yarns cause the First) so video nasties do not make children violent thugs.

All that the video nasties do is to reflect a world where violence exists. What will make kids violent is not the fiction but the real experience of school authority, the police and violence inside the family and all the strains of capitalism in crisis.

The bill to be passed by parliament will merely add to the power of an already violent and oppressive state. The support given to it by some of the left shows the illusions many have in the state and further illustrates the way ideas of fighting oppression and liberation have degenerated into old-fashioned reformism.

Social engineering

Competition and Control at Work
Stephen Hill
Heinemann Educational £4.95

This is an infuriating book. It is mostly made of bits quoted from other books, which makes it very difficult to read.

The book is about an important subject: the changing nature of relationships at work and their effect on class struggle. The increasing proletarianisation of work is a key part of the Marxist analysis. Capitalism has concentrated workers in ever greater numbers and pushed them all down to the same level.

By concentrating workers in this way, capitalism creates its own gravedigger. Workers are placed in a position where they have the possibility of seeing their collective interests, of understanding their strength through collective interests, of understanding their strength through collective action and ultimately of seeing the need to take collective power. The interesting question is whether capitalists can find ways of stopping this process.

Competition has forced capitalists to concentrate production. Now technical change may mean that it is possible to disperse it. Concentrated production with heavy discipline imposed on the workers may not be cheaper than other methods of organising production. For instance, the introduction of Measured Day Work involved massive increases in non-productive supervisory staff.

The book looks at various ways of altering the organisation of capitalist production so as to avoid class conflict. Workers co-operatives are one way—Mr Hill thinks that these do not involve exploitation. They do involve exploitation—the moment that the co-op borrows money from a bank or takes any part in the capitalist economy. Profit and surplus value are not the same thing. Surplus value produced in one part of the capitalist economy can surface as profit somewhere else altogether.

What workers co-ops do involve is self-supervision and self-motivation.

The confidence trick of the capitalist economy persuades the workers to exploit themselves more effectively.

The book also looks at the organisation of Japanese industry. There, conflict is avoided by big corporations operating a paternalistic regime and guaranteeing each worker a 'career' and a job for life. This is done at the expense of the many sub-contract companies that supply the big corporations. Their employees get no such security but are divided between small competing firms. The workers with potential power are kept happy and the

unhappy workers have no power.

Of course, social engineering cannot prevent the underlying economic crisis of capitalism. However, can capitalists use reorganisation of production to stop the gravedigger getting out his shovel?

There is nothing new about attempts by capitalists to disrupt workers' ability to organise, using both carrot and stick. The 'productivity offensive' in the late 60s and early 70s was an example. The crisis itself, however, limits the amount of carrot available.

However, modern automated

technology make manufacturing so capital intensive that the cost of social engineering for the small workforce could be relatively low. The first stage of automation deskilled work in both factory and office. The current wave of automation will eliminate manual workers altogether, leaving only workers performing design and control functions. Although those workers that remain will be super-exploited, and therefore have enormous potential industrial power, in practice they may well be easily incorporated, as they are few in number.

Modern technology does not even necessarily lead to a concentration of production. New technology in the printing industry has meant more firms with a smaller total workforce and increased overall profits.

If this scenario bore any relation to the truth, the future would look grim for socialists. The workforce would be divided between a manufacturing elite and a great mass in the non-automated service sector, and an even greater mass unemployed. Those sections of the working class with economic power would have little interest in using it. Those sections with nothing to lose would have little economic power.

Mr Hill looks at society from the point of view of a social engineer trying to keep the system going. The questions he fails to answer about the future of work relationships and the implications for the class struggle are questions that revolutionary socialists need to think about carefully.

Chris Stephenson

The unfunny comedy

TV comedy is often racist, sexist and generally reactionary. Sue Cockerill argues that some of it isn't.

My normal feelings about TV sitcoms are that you can count yourself lucky to laugh out loud once in half an hour. But I looked forward to watching the first episode of *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* with quite different expectations.

For one thing the authors had been responsible for *The Likely Lads* which I think was one of the best comedies ever screened. They also wrote *Porridge*, so their track record was pretty good.

The other reason was the subject: British immigrant workers on a building site in West Germany. It seemed to have great potential.

But the fact is, *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* isn't very funny. It is worth watching, but not only or mainly for the laughs.

I think there is a reason why it isn't funny, it showed some of the realities of working class life in a period of crisis. The reality of mass unemployment which has forced the men to go to West Germany shows through.

It isn't very amusing for people to have to leave their homes and families to work in a strange country. Their living conditions are no joke either, running through mud to get to the distant showers. Living together in a hut brings on very severe tensions and suspicions.

By contrast *The Likely Lads* could be much funnier because it dealt with workers during the boom. Bob and Terry — the main characters — have their parallels in the present series. Bob was the respectable, socially aspiring one, constantly having problems because of his association with Terry, who preferred the pub to the factory floor. The programme wasn't free of sexism — Thelma,

Bob's ultra status-conscious fiancée, was often the 'nagging wife' stereotype. But there was a hint of rebellion in the air.

Terry's unemployment was voluntary. He was typical of a lot of young working class people in the boom who vaguely rejected the idea of working from Monday to Friday to acquire consumer durables and cars. Bob's continued friendship with him was seen to be part of his own doubts about respectability.

The problem now is getting to be a wage slave at all. The characters in *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* have to go all the way to Düsseldorf for the privilege of being exploited.

There are Bob and Terry characters here as well — Oz, who walks out on his wife, saying he's going to the chipshop before leaving for Germany, and squanders all his wages on drink, prostitutes and useless hi-fi equipment. Then there is Neville (who has only come to Germany to make enough money for he and his wife to move to a house on a 'meat' estate).

But Oz is not in the least likeable (unlike Terry). He is shown as bigoted, chauvinistic to women, and lacking in any real friendship or solidarity with his mates.

On the other hand, Neville's misery and homesickness are realistic but more depressing than amusing. There are some very funny moments, though — when Oz wakes up on a plane back to Sunderland following the match between Sunderland and Liege. The Sunderland fans pick him up totally pissed wearing a Sunderland scarf, and assume he has come over with them for the match. As one of them remarks: 'There's always some missing on the way back anyway.'

Some of the other characters — the huge dumb West Countryman, the sharp Londoner and the Birmingham bore with the building society account (who for some

reason reminds me of a member of the *Militant*) are marvellous.

The wives, one of which is shown to have an independent life, are nevertheless still not as free of stereotyping as the men.

There are reasons beyond the situation itself why the series isn't incredibly funny. After all, *The Young Ones* was funny, and so was Bill Forsyth's film *That Sinking Feeling* which are both very much about slump and unemployment. They were funny because they pushed situations to bizarre lengths. *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* doesn't. It relies very much on normal events and a naturalistic style.

I think it's a pity there isn't more time spent on the work situation itself, rather than the hut, the bars, and personal relationships.

The parts that *have* shown the site are quite good. In the first episode, the hierarchy was established. Germans, Brits, Turks.

But the problems posed by 'gastarbeiter' for organised workers were also shown. The Brits work then arises out, undermining the slower workspeed established by the German workers. The Germans shout 'Slower! Slower!' at the British, while the British yell at the Turkish labourers to hurry up.

The programme isn't at all about 'Brits versus Germans' as some of IWL's advertisements have made out. In fact at one point the Germans strike in support of a sacked British worker. Even the anti-Turkish remarks — addressing Turks as 'ayattollah' — comes over as showing the way people take out their frustrations on someone seen as 'lower' than them.

I suppose it is a comment on British television's class-based programming that a comedy about working class people which doesn't show them as intrinsically comical and stupid should be such a rarity.

Rosa Luxemburg is hardly an unknown figure on the left. Nor is she an unpopular one. Answering a questionnaire during the Labour leadership contest Eric Heffer described her as his heroine. And only last month Jill Tweedie gave Rosa a favourable mention in her *Guardian* column (for complaining that her lover put too much politics and not enough affection in his letters!).

So why hasn't there been a sudden surge of interest in Rosa Luxemburg as an anti-war campaigner?

Looking at it logically there should be. The Greenham Peace Camp has put *women* against war very firmly in the minds of much of the left. There is already a considerable output of books on the theme of women and disarmament. Some of them have begun to look at women anti-war campaigners of the past.

And once you start to draw up a short list of women anti-war campaigners of the past then it would seem difficult to leave Rosa out. She was internationally prominent as an anti-war campaigner well before the first world war. She co-authored the anti-war resolution adopted by the Socialist International in 1907 which was the official viewpoint of European socialism right up until the great betrayal at the beginning of the first world war.

Rosa however stuck to her principles. She found herself one of the most famous opponents of the war in Germany. And as a result she spent over three years of the war in prison. There she wrote what still remains one of the most eloquent denunciations of the war and those 'socialists' who supported it—the *Junius Pamphlet*. On her release from prison at the end of the war she plunged into intense political activity for what she clearly understood was the only way of preventing a repetition of the slaughter. And because of that political stand she was brutally murdered less than three months later.

Record

Even in outline it is an impressive record. And at least the outline must be familiar to most of the people who write the Greenham-inspired books and articles.

The reason none of them dream of following it up is because virtually everything that Rosa said and did in her fight against war challenges the Greenham Peace Camp consensus which is so influential on the left today.

For Rosa Luxemburg's fight against war was inextricably bound up with her revolutionary socialism.

The starting point of her anti-war campaigning was that war was the product of capitalism. This is how she tersely described the first world war in a set of theses on the tasks of socialists she drew up in 1915:

'(The world war) is but the product of the imperialist rivalries between the capitalist classes of the different countries for world hegemony and for the monopoly in the exploitation and oppression of the areas still not under the heel of capitalism.'

And if war was the inevitable product of the capitalist system then the only way to get

The first peace woman

peace was to get rid of capitalism.

'World peace cannot be assured by projects Utopian, or at bottom, reactionary, such as tribunals of arbitration by capitalist diplomats, diplomatic "disarmament" conventions...and other illusions. Imperialism, militarism and war can never be abolished nor attenuated so long as the capitalist class exercises, uncontested, its class hegemony. The sole means of successful resistance and the only guarantee of peace in the world, is the capacity for action and revolutionary will of the international proletariat to hurl its full weight into the balance.'

There was no question of Rosa being either a pacifist or a parliamentarist in her fight to end war.

'It is a pathetic delusion to believe that the capitalists would submit willingly to a verdict arrived at by a parliament, by a National Assembly, to implement socialism... All ruling classes have fought with savage desperation for their prerogatives... The struggle for socialism is the mightiest civil war that world history has ever seen, and the proletarian revolution must prepare the necessary tools for this civil war, and must learn to use them—to fight and win.

'To provide the compact working class with all political power for the tasks of the revolution—that is the dictatorship of the proletariat and thus true democracy. The democracy that does not deceive the people is not to be found where the wage-slave sits beside the capitalist...in mendacious equality to debate on their vital questions. Such a democracy is to be found only where the million-strong proletarian mass seizes supreme power in its calloused fist in order to use it, as the god Thor used his hammer, to smash the heads of the ruling classes.'

No wonder pacifists, feminists and reformists keep quiet about Rosa as a campaigner against war. For to read what she wrote explodes the myth that tries to dismiss



revolutionary socialist politics as the product of machismo and male-domination. For Rosa certainly wasn't parroting the words I have just quoted. It was she who had developed the ideas and, in Germany, led the fight for them.

Exception

Nor was Rosa some curious exception in being a woman who led the fight for those ideas. Any short list of women against war would also surely have to include Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai, both of whom were arguing in exactly the same terms as Rosa.

And arguing for a far more successful road than any of the pacifist byways to which the history of the movement against war is usually confined. For the Russian and German revolutions, which were the culmination of their politics, not only mobilised millions against war, they actually stopped armies in their tracks.

But perhaps it's all different in the nuclear age?

Rosa herself answered that. She recollected the saying of Engels that 'Capitalist society faces a dilemma, either an advance to socialism or a reversion to barbarism'. Now in the midst of world war she could see the 'terrible impact' of those words.

'We stand today...before the awful proposition: either the triumph of imperialism and the destruction of all culture...depopulation, desolation, degeneration, a vast cemetery; or the victory of Socialism, that is the conscious struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism, against its methods, against war. This is the dilemma of world history, its inevitable choice whose scales are trembling in the balance, awaiting the decision of the proletariat.'

In the shadow of nuclear holocaust Rosa's words shine out as even more relevant than when she wrote them.

Pete Goodwin